

# **Sino-Cambodia**

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## **2010 - 2018: To what extent has the Chinese Government contributed to the decline of multiparty democracy in Cambodia?**

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*This work is substantially my own, and where any part of this work is not my own, it has been indicated by acknowledging the source of that part of those parts of the work.*

**Abstract:**

Cambodia has become an integral component of China's strategic objectives throughout Southeast Asia. China's intention to expand the Belt and Road Initiative through Southeast Asia is contingent on its ability to maintain healthy cooperation with the Hun Sen administration in Cambodia. Through the patron-client dynamic of Sino-Cambodian relations, China has secured rights to vital deep-water ports, hydroelectric dams, vital BRI infrastructure and access to the South China Sea. In recent years, Prime Minister Hun Sen's, Cambodian People's Party (CPP), has received international criticism and sanctions from traditional aid-donors for infringing on democratic rights. As a result of this, the CPP has become asymmetrically dependent on Chinese economic patronage. This thesis seeks to determine the extent to which the Chinese Government has contributed to the decline of multiparty democracy in Cambodia between 2010 and 2018. To achieve this, the paper conducts a process tracing analysis to determine causation between Chinese patronage and the breakdown of democracy in Cambodia. In doing so, this thesis uses the theoretical framework of patron-client to understand the actions of China and Cambodia alike. The core findings of this study demonstrate the party-to-party relationship between the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and the CPP, and how this contributes to Cambodia's ideological convergence. It further establishes the way in which China's objectives in Cambodia have become mutually reinforcing. The final finding of this thesis demonstrates how Prime Minister Hun Sen's internal legitimacy is dependent on Chinese economic patronage. Through the research findings of this study, this thesis also contributes to broader literature regarding the application of patron-client theory to China and Southeast Asia.

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**Figure 1: List of Abbreviations**

Abbreviation	Explanation
<b>AIIB</b>	Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank
<b>AMM</b>	ASEAN Ministerial Meeting
<b>ASEAN</b>	The Association of Southeast Asian Nations
<b>BRI</b>	Belt and Road Initiative
<b>CCP</b>	The Chinese Communist Party
<b>CNRP</b>	Cambodia National Rescue Party
<b>CPP</b>	Cambodian People’s Party
<b>DAC</b>	Development Assistance Committee
<b>EU</b>	The European Union
<b>FDI</b>	Foreign Direct Investment
<b>ODA</b>	Official Development Assistance
<b>PM</b>	Prime Minister
<b>PRC</b>	The People’s Republic of China
<b>PRK</b>	People’s Republic of Kampuchea
<b>TPP</b>	Trans-Pacific Partnership
<b>U.S.</b>	The United States of America
<b>UN</b>	The United Nations
<b>UNTAC</b>	United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia
<b>WTO</b>	World Trade Organisation

**Figures:**

Figure 1: List of Abbreviations.....4

Figure 2: Causal Diagram (Hypothesis 1).....35

Figure 3: Causal Diagram (Hypothesis 2).....36

Figure 4: Causal Diagram (Alternative Explanation).....37

Figure 5: Expected Evidence.....38-39

Figure 6: Weighted Evidence.....40-41

Figure 7: Cambodian General Election and The United States’ Response 2018.....46

Figure 8: Cambodian General Election and The European Union’s Response 2018.....47

Figure 9: Cambodian General Election and China’s Response 2018.....48

Figure 10: Mapping China’s Global Investments and Inequality.....58

Figure 11: Cambodian People’s Party Campaign Slogans .....67

Figure 12: Chinese Foreign Direct Investment in Cambodia (All figures in USD).....70

Figure 13: Chinese investment capital in Cambodia (All figures in USD million).....72

Figure 14: Committed Investment in Cambodia (2015-2018) (All figures in USD) .....73

Figure 15: Chinese and United States Aid to Cambodia (All figures in USD million).....75

**Table of Contents:**

Abstract:.....2  
Acknowledgements:.....3  
Figures:.....5

**CHAPTER 1: UNDERSTANDING THE SINO-CAMBODIAN PUZZLE**

1.1 Introduction.....8-10  
1.2 The Organisation of the Thesis.....11  
1.3 The Value of this Study.....11-12  
1.4 Literature Review.....13  
  
    1.4.1 *The History of Cambodian Democracy and Sino-Cambodian relations*.....13-16  
    1.4.2 *China’s Relationship with Developing Nations*.....16-19  
    1.4.3 *Literature Gaps and the Scope of this Thesis*.....20

**CHAPTER 2: THE THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK OF PATRON-CLIENT**

2.1 Outlining the Framework of Patron-Client Theory.....21-24  
  
    2.1.1 *Origin of Patron-Client Theory*.....21  
    2.1.2 *Characteristics of a Patron-State*.....21-22  
    2.1.3 *Characteristics of a Client-State*.....23  
    2.1.4 *The Dynamics of a Patron-Client Relationship*.....23-24  
  
2.2 Critiques of Patron-Client Theory.....25-26  
2.3 How does this study vary from Ciorciari’s Critique?.....27-30  
2.4 The Theoretical Contribution of this Study.....30-31

**CHAPTER 3: DESIGNING THE METHODOLOGY**

3.1 The Use of Process Tracing.....32  
3.2 Implementing Process Tracing.....32-42  
3.3 Indicators and Parameters of this Study.....42-43  
3.4 Addressing Research and Instrument Bias.....44

**CHAPTER 4: PARTY-TO-PARTY PATRONAGE**

4.1 Political Stability.....45  
4.2 Political Stability and Traditional Donors.....45-47  
4.3 Political Stability and China.....47-49  
4.4 CCP and CPP, Party-to-Party Patronage?.....49-52

**CHAPTER 5: THE OBJECTIVES OF A PATRON-STATE ARE REINFORCING**

5.1 Strategic Advantage.....53  
  
    5.1.1 *Influence within Southeast Asia*.....54  
    5.1.2 *Securing Natural Resources*.....55-56  
    5.1.3 *Geo Strategic Positioning*.....56-57  
    5.1.4 *The Mekong River Development Plan*.....59-60  
  
5.2 International Solidarity.....60

5.2.1 <i>ASEAN and The South China Sea</i> .....	60-61
5.2.2 <i>The Belt and Road Initiative</i> .....	61
5.3 The Process of Ideological Convergence.....	62-64
<b>CHAPTER 6: POLITICAL RHETORIC AND CHINESE ECONOMIC PATRONAGE</b>	
6.1 Prime Minister Hun Sen’s Political Rhetoric.....	66-67
6.2 Cambodia’s Economy.....	68
6.3 China’s Contribution to Cambodia’s Economic Growth.....	68-69
6.3.1 <i>Foreign Direct Investment</i> .....	69-70
6.3.2 <i>Aid and Loans</i> .....	70-72
6.4 Weakening Economic Relationship with the U.S. and EU.....	74-75
6.5 Does Economic Patronage Contribute to Ideological Convergence.....	76-78
<b>CHAPTER 7: INTERPRETING THE RESEARCH FINDINGS</b> .....	
<b>CHAPTER 8: LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS</b>	
7.1 Learning from the Methodology – Lessons about Correlation and Causation.....	82
7.2 Limitations within this Study & Recommendations for Future Researchers.....	82
<b>CONCLUSION</b> .....	83-85
<b>BIBLIOGRAPHY</b> .....	86-104

# CHAPTER 1

## UNDERSTANDING THE SINO-CAMBODIAN PUZZLE

### 1.1 Introduction

Throughout the past decade, China's strategic interest in 'transition' and 'developing' nation has increased (Neuweg 2018). China's tactical interest in particular nations intensified in 2013 with the announcement of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) (Huang 2016). With Chinese investment in developing nations increasing, so too is the influence and leverage China has within these recipient nations (Barbesgaard et al. 2019). China's position as a vessel for development in transitional countries and the decline of traditional donor nations is uncharted terrain. Thus, the scholarship lacks research that assesses how China's strategic involvement in developing countries affects the internal politics of those nations. The role of China as an aid and development donor is a relatively new phenomena and the implications of this needs to be explored more thoroughly.

This paper seeks to determine whether Beijing's patronage has been a contributing factor in the decline of democracy by the Cambodian People's Party (CPP) and leader Prime Minister Hun Sen. Historically Cambodia's political landscape has been turbulent, enduring civil wars and violent dictatorships that have prevented and physically dismantled democratic institutions throughout the country (Chandler 2018). However, in 1993, after decades of political unrest, Cambodia held its first democratic election through a United Nations (UN) peacekeeping operation known as the 'Paris Agreements' (Roberts 2016).

With the shadow of Cambodia's unstable and violent past, democracy in Cambodia could not be achieved through one enforced election and therefore, subsequently faced severe



challenges of legitimacy (Kosal 2009). The incitement of fear of reverting to civil war paved the way for Prime Minister Hun Sen and his political party, the CPP, to gain office through a coup in 1997 and gradually concentrate its power over the following years (Peou 1998).

In 2010 Cambodia experienced mounting internal pressure for governmental reform, with the opposition party, the Cambodia National Rescue Party (CNRP), posing the first legitimate threat to Prime Minister Hun Sen's rule since he gained office (Heder 2012). For the next eight years, Prime Minister Hun Sen systematically dismantled the CNRP, utilising strategies of censorship, intimidation and false imprisonment to sustain the CPP's power (Heder 2011). In 2018, Cambodia's General Election proved the country had descended into autocrat rule (Morgenbesser 2019).

Coinciding with these eight years of intense democratic breakdown, Prime Minister Hun Sen strengthened his political and economic relationship with China, acting as a client-state to the CCP (Burgos and Ear 2010). In 2010, Prime Minister Hun Sen intertwined his government with China through the creation of The Comprehensive Partnership of Cooperation Agreement, which implemented goals and allocated funding to increase development projects by China in Cambodia (Chanborey 2015). Between 2010 and 2018, bilateral cooperation between China and Cambodia accelerated, amplifying Cambodia's economic dependency on China and emulating the 'Chinese Model' of patron-client relationships (Ciorciari 2015).

Despite Cambodia's relative size and economic status, China's strategic interest in Cambodia is extensive (Chen 2018). Cambodia offers China the ability to further its influence in Southeast Asia and undermine the historical American hegemony in the region (Devonshire-Ellis 2014). The geographical positioning of Cambodia allows China to use it as a linchpin to

connect mainland Southeast Asia to the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), whilst also securing strategic trade and military ports alongside the Southern Coast (Burgos & Ear 2010). This thesis, therefore, poses the question of whether China's growing investment and involvement in Cambodia has contributed to the decline of multiparty democracy in Cambodia.

In doing so, this thesis will adopt the theoretical framework of patron-client theory to understand the entrenchment of Cambodia's reliance on finance. In conjunction with this, the research methodology of process-tracing will analyse the reinforcing nature of Chinese patronage and assess whether this undermined democratic practices within Cambodia between 2010 and 2018. Ultimately this thesis attempts to offer insights to and answer the question:

*To what extent has the Chinese government contributed to the decline of multiparty democracy in Cambodia?*

## **1.2 Organisation of the thesis**

This thesis will begin by contextualising China and Cambodia's relationship, including specific characteristics of its historical interactions that are still present today, such as financial sponsorship. The literature review will examine pre-existing research on Cambodia's struggle with democracy and China's relationship with developing nations, including Cambodia. In doing so, this will demonstrate the research gap in Sino-Cambodian relations and subsequently substantiate the need for this study. This introduction to the topic allows the reader to understand how China legitimised the CPP from its conception. The framework of patron-client theory will then be introduced, along with how this study will contribute to a broader definition of the theory. It is essential to set metrics to distinguish correlation and causation, which this paper explains within the methodological research design following the literature review. This section outlines the hypotheses as well as the measures the researcher took to address instrument bias. The process tracing findings will then be divided into three chapters; 'Party-to-Party Patronage', 'The Objectives of a Patron-State are Reinforcing' and 'Political Rhetoric and Chinese Economic Patronage'. The thesis will conclude by addressing limitations within the research and suggesting recommendations for further study.

## **1.3 The Value of this Study**

Before reviewing the present literature, it is worthwhile outlining the academic contributions this thesis will endeavour to make. This thesis is responsive to the recent wave of Chinese investment in developing countries and the limited research present regarding whether or not this affects the internal politics of the host country (Gu et al. 2008). This thesis uses the case study of Cambodia to understand whether there is causation between Chinese patronage and weakening democratic practices.

The focus of this thesis has become more pressing as a result of the contentious 2018 Cambodian General Elections in which the CPP outlawed the opposition party and subsequently confirmed Cambodia as a one-party state (Un 2019).

Whilst this thesis focuses on the case study of Sino-Cambodian relations, the application of patron-client theory established throughout, provides a framework for additional studies regarding Chinese patronage in developing countries, particularly in Southeast Asia. This thesis, therefore, aims to build upon Scott's (1972) research in tailoring the theory of patron-client to Asia and deciphering how patron-client dynamics affect democracy.

Specifically, through the use of the case study this research aims to contribute to the application of patron-client theory to China and Cambodia as well as demonstrating how this theoretical framework can operate on a party-to-party level between countries. This thesis will show how the entrenchment of patron-client structures forms a reinforcing dynamic and therefore contribute to broader literature by distinguishing whether this leads to the ideological convergence of the client-state.

In Chapter 2, 2.4, this thesis's contribution specifically to patron-client theory is detailed.

## **1.4 Literature Review**

To investigate China's influence on the decline of multiparty democracy within Cambodia, this thesis must situate itself within the broader historical context. The literature review will adopt an 'inverted pyramid' structure to firstly outline the more general relevant studies, before narrowing down specific research to look at how China interacts with developing nations. Therefore, it is fundamental to firstly review literature pertaining to Cambodia's historical challenges with democracy. In doing so, it is vital to understand the presence of Chinese financial sponsorship historically and the role of China in legitimising the CPP from its conception. The literature review will then examine how China interacts with developing countries and whether current research can decipher what this means for the internal politics of these recipient countries. Finally, the literature review will conclude with a synopsis of research gaps and reiterate the relevancy of this study.

### ***1.4.1 The History of Cambodian democracy and Sino-Cambodian Relations***

Cambodia gained independence from France in 1953, giving the country autonomy to control its domestic politics and international relations (Kosal 2009). To supplement the economic support previously offered by France, Cambodia enhanced its relationships with the Soviet Union and China (Kosal 2009).

Sino-Cambodian relations intensified between 1975-1979 in which China was the principal financier to the Pol Pot regime and the subsequent Khmer Rouge genocide (Mertha 2014). Studies conducted by Heuveline (1998) in De Walque (2006) estimates during the Pol Pot regime, between 2.2 million and 2.8 million deaths occurred. With the removal of Pol Pot in 1979, China continued to support the Khmer Rouge against the newly established People's Republic of Kampuchea (PRK) (Ciorciari 2015; Kosal 2009). The Cambodian people viewed

PRK as an arm of Communist Vietnam (Kosal 2009). China's patronage to the Khmer Rouge, continued for several years, in which China would supply equipment such as weaponry, along the Thai-Cambodian border up until 1990 (Abuza 1993).

The current Cambodian government, The Cambodian People's Party, have explicit links to both the Khmer Rouge and PRK. Specifically, Prime Minister (PM) Hun Sen and several senior CPP officials who commanded troops in the Khmer Rouge, before fleeing to Vietnam to join the PRK (Ciorciari 2015). PRK officials gained trust through their anti-Chinese sentiments, with the now PM Hun Sen, previously describing China as the 'root of everything evil' (Ciorciari 2015).

PM Hun Sen's anti-Chinese sentiments ceased in 1991 with the collapse of the Soviet Union (Ciorciari 2015). With the collapse of the Soviet Union, Cambodia entered a transition period in which it was independent of France's colonial control and the patronage of the Soviet Union. In 1993 the United Nations Transitional Authority of Cambodia (UNTAC) in following the 'Paris Agreement' oversaw Cambodia's first democratic election (Peou 2019). The UNTAC process implemented a multiparty democratic system in Cambodia, which encouraged an open market economy (Un 2005).

The official results of the election led to the co-prime ministership of Hun Sen and Sihanouk's son, Norodom Ranariddh (Roberts 1994). As tensions grew between PM Hun Sen and PM Norodom Ranariddh, it became evident that a co-prime ministership would not be sustainable (Ciorciari 2015). Foreseeing this, China invited Hun Sen on a fully-funded trip to Beijing in 1996, to rectify past tensions and establish the cooperative relationship that would follow (Sothirak 2003). China's endorsement of Hun Sen and the CPP was made evident in 1997

when Hun Sen staged a coup resulting in the removal of PM Norodom Ranariddh from office (Dahles 2013). Hun Sen's coup received immense international criticism, including the United States (U.S.) and European Union (EU) which imposed sanctions on Cambodia for not abiding by UNTAC (Kosal 2009; Dahles 2013). China used this as an opportunity, to cement its diplomatic importance to the CPP, giving them a US\$10 million loan after the coup and an additional US\$28 million worth of military equipment six months later (Kosal 2009; Ciorciari 2015; Dahles 2013). At this time, the Chinese government refused to side with the international community in condemning the CPP's violent path to office (Demetrianova 2016). China's engagement with PM Hun Sen before the 1997 coup and the economic patronage immediately after, demonstrates the Chinese government's role in legitimising Hun Sen's government from its conception (Dahles 2013). PM Hun Sen showed his gratitude by immediately closing the Taipei Economic and Cultural Representative Office and banning Cambodian officials from conventionally visiting Taiwan, a contentiously unrecognised Chinese state (Ciorciari 2015). This two-way exchange has become emblematic of their relationship that would follow in later years.

In 2002, Cambodia introduced 'Commune Elections' as part of a decentralisation policy aiming to maintain and strengthen grassroots democratic values (Chheang 2017). The commune councils would govern 1621 communes, villages and neighbourhoods (Un & Ledgerwood 2003). In 2002, the CPP's power consolidation process became apparent, with the CPP winning over 90% of commune chief seats (Chheang 2017). Despite this, Cambodia was yet to experience other forms of democratic breakdown; for example, legitimate opposition parties still existed (Chheang 2017). The two-way exchange of Cambodia's international solidarity and China's economic patronage continued into 2009 when the CPP sent 22 Uighur refugees, an ethnic group central in China's civil disputes, back to China. This

act resulted in the U.S. suspending aid to Cambodia (Dahles 2013). Following the same pattern, China rewarded Cambodia's loyalty two days later by pledging US\$1.2 billion to Cambodia, again further embedding the nations patron-client dynamics (Dahles 2013).

Throughout Southeast Asia, China is viewed with scepticism; this trust deficit is the result of China's historic sponsorship of violent, communist regimes in the region (Chheang 2017). In an attempt to minimise the contemporary consequences of this, the CPP and Chinese government began the process of downplaying the role of Chinese sponsorship during the Khmer Rouge genocide (Kosal 2009). In doing so, China successfully helped PM Hun Sen manage the Khmer Rouge Trial proceedings, allowing him to resist efforts made by the U.S. and the UN to hold an internationally controlled tribunal (Ciorciari 2015). This was important to the future of the CPP, as a judicial process could have indicted PM Hun Sen and other CPP figures to be trialled as members of the Khmer Rouge cadres (Demetrianova 2016)

#### ***1.4.2 China's Relationship with Developing Nations***

The following section of the literature review will discuss current research pertaining to China's relationship with developing nations.

China's rapid economic growth and global expansion has demonstrated that democracy is not a prerequisite for development (Weiss 2019). Likewise, Beijing's use of soft power has led to the 'Beijing consensus' meaning that neo-liberal policies are not required for economic development (Un 2009). This positions China to have a unique and impactful relationship with other developing nations (Gu et al. 2008). With China's growth as an economic superpower and its subsequent opening economy, China has learnt how to exert soft power throughout Southeast through strategic foreign aid and developmental projects (Kurlantzick



2006). China's foreign policy is outlined in the 1955 'Principles for Peaceful Coexistence' which emphasises mutual benefit, respect for sovereign states and the policy of 'non-interference' in the international affairs of other nations (Zongze 2006). Furthermore, as analysed by Yang (2006), China's accession to the World Trade Organisation (WTO) in 2001 significantly altered its global presence and in particular, how it interacted with developing nations. China's WTO accession increased developing nations export opportunities to China, giving them a regional market to contribute to (Yang 2006). Another significant effect of China's accession to WTO was the intensification of international capital as a result of China increasing foreign direct investment (FDI) (Yang 2006).

Following this in 2005, China's State Council Information Office published the White Paper, China's Peaceful Development Road (Zongze 2006). This emphasised how Chinese economic expansion would use a 'win-win' scenario, to contribute to global prosperity (Zongze 2006).

Current literature pertaining to Chinese foreign aid and the effects this has on recipient countries is hindered by the lack of reliable and transparent documents published by the People's Republic of China (PRC) and CCP (Brant 2013). In conjunction with this, the form and distribution of Chinese foreign aid differ substantially from that of traditional donors (Brautigam 2011). Chinese aid is often described as 'foreign aid with Chinese characteristics', as it does not align with Official Development Assistance (ODA) set forth by the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) (Brant 2013). Chinese foreign aid typically comes in the form of a grant or an interest-free or concessional loan with the explicit intent to be used by the recipient country in a way that aligns to China's national interests (Brant 2014). China also offers developing nations debt relief, which has been criticised internationally as exposing developing nations to a debt-trap (Chheang 2018).

Chinese aid has become increasingly popular amongst developing nations, in particular those with autocrat regimes, as China does not impose conditions of good governance or democratisation like traditional donors do (Hutt 2016). In 2006, Kurlantzick stated, "the values and models China projects to Southeast Asia – and eventually to other developing countries – could be disastrous for a region of nascent democracies and weak civil societies" (Kurlantzick 2006 p.2). Developing nations have welcomed China's foreign aid and investment as it ensures non-interference with the domestic affairs of their country (Lengauer 2011). Traditional donors have criticised this model for not holding developing nations to standards of good governance and democratic values (Lengauer 2011). Indeed, substantive claims that China undermines democratic principles by providing unconditional loans and aid to autocratic regimes have been made. However, Weiss (2019) concludes that China's ODA aligns with its strategic and political interests opposed to the nature of domestic regimes within the recipient country (Weiss 2019). Weiss (2019) further states that whilst China does not seek to export the 'Chinese Model' or autocracy; it has made it easier for authoritarianism to thrive within other nations. The concept of the 'Chinese Model' first emerged in the 1990s, in reference to China's success in avoiding the path of collapse that other Communist regimes were facing (Freeman 2015). The Chinese path is characterised as Deng Xiaoping stated, by "using two hands to develop the economy while maintaining political stability, keeping both hands strong" (Xiaoping in Freeman 2015 p.34).

Whilst traditional donors distribute conditional aid, China has been criticised for issuing 'tied aid' (Brant 2014). 'Tied aid' refers to foreign aid that is connected to trade and investment, which is disproportionately beneficial to China's national interests (Kjollesdal & Welle-Strand 2010). In conjunction with this, approximately 40% of China's foreign aid is disturbed through the form of 'complete projects' (Brant 2014). 'Complete projects' are financed through grants

or interest-free loans; however, these projects are predominantly managed and staffed by China or Chinese-owned businesses (Brant 2014). A condition of Chinese foreign aid often requires development projects to be given to Chinese contractors and that at least 50% of project materials and services be sourced from China (Kjollesdal & Welle-Strand 2010).

Most recently, Chinese aid has been criticised for exporting surveillance and censorship technologies (Weiss 2019). These technologies have made information suppression and monitoring more obtainable to autocrat rulers (Weiss 2019). Weiss importantly notes, however, that this provision does not dictate the way these technologies are utilised within that domestic country's political regime; instead, it just makes the technology accessible (Weiss 2019). Therefore, rather than China overtly promoting autocracy, aspects of its domestic agenda coincide with enabling the sustainment or rise of authoritarianism in other parts of the world (Weiss 2019).

As the literature review demonstrated, researchers have extensively documented the history of Sino-Cambodian relations, the rise of Chinese investment and foreign aid, and how this differs from traditional, Western donors. The literature review has outlined key trends and techniques used by Chinese investment and foreign assistance to achieve different national interests.

### ***1.4.3 Literature gaps and the scope of this thesis***

In recognition of the current literature, this thesis will endeavour to research whether causation can be shown between Chinese investment and democratic breakdown in Cambodia. When claiming an endeavour to contribute to broader literature, it is vital to be explicit in the scope and limitations of the research. As such, this thesis aims to address gaps within the literature through two core contributions. Firstly, this thesis endeavours to make an academic contribution to the causal relationship between Chinese patronage and Cambodian democratic decline. Secondly, this thesis will extend upon and demonstrate variants of the application of the patron-client theory.

The academic contribution of this thesis will determine whether empirical evidence exists, that shows China has contributed to the decline of democratic institutions within Cambodia. To achieve this, the research will apply the framework of patron-client theory and the research methodology of process-tracing.

The theoretical contribution of this thesis is to understand how patron-client theory applies to China and Southeast Asia, through the case study of Cambodia. The theoretical contributions highlight an extension of a patron-client theory which surpasses the patronage of traditional donors. The theoretical contributions of this thesis are discussed in Chapter 2, 2.4.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **THE THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK OF PATRON-CLIENT**

#### **2.1 Outlining the framework of patron-client theory**

##### **2.1.1 Origin of Patron-Client Theory**

The patron-client framework originated in anthropological studies to explain relationships between a leader and a follower (Carney 1989). A traditional patron-client relationship would involve a 'lord' that offers personal protection to a 'peasant', which demonstrates subordination (Hall 1974). The features of a traditional patron-client relationship led to the theory's application to the field of comparative politics (Carney 1989). Patron-client theory within comparative politics can describe two types of relationships; foremost, a relationship that exists internally within a country's domestic politics or a relationship that exists between two nations (1989). Ultimately, for this study, patron-client theory offers a framework to explain particular types of relationships between stronger and weaker states. The definitional premise of the patron-client theory outlined below provides a systematic description for identifying and explaining the relationship between China and Cambodia.

##### **2.1.2 Characteristics of a Patron-State**

The patron-state is characterised as the dominant power, which capitalises on the loyalty of the client-state, usually by employing the client as a strategic asset to further its national agenda in some capacity (Veenendaal 2017). The core objective of a patron-state is to obtain intangible benefits – such as influence and control, in the most inexpensive way possible (Carney 1989).

Shoemaker and Spanier (1984) identified three core objectives of a patron-state (1)

Ideological Convergence (2) International Solidarity (3) Strategic Advantage.

1. Ideological convergence refers to the patron-states objective to spread its particular national ideology and promote it as superior (Carney 1989). If a patron-states motive is ideological convergence the patron will exert its influence and control in an attempt to alter the client-states ideological positioning, or, where there is shared ideology, strengthen it (Carney 1989). The pursuit of ideological convergence for a patron-state is twofold, foremost it allows for the spread of its national ideology, and secondly, the client-state becomes an exemplar centrepiece in which the patron-state can use to exhibit the ideology (Carney 1989).
2. International solidarity refers to the client-state openly supporting the interest of the patron-state in the international arena (Carney 1989). The core value displayed through international solidarity is dependability, in that the client-states obedience to the patron-state is mostly guaranteed (Carney 1989). International solidarity is essential for states experiencing international scrutiny as the obedience of the client affords the patron legitimacy (Carney 1989).
3. Strategic advantage refers to a patron-states desire to obtain a particular benefit through an alliance with a client-state (Carney 1989). Strategic advantage is often something that the patron cannot achieve domestically, for example, strategic location or natural resources (Carney 1989).

### **2.1.3 Characteristics of a Client-State**

A patron-client framework describes the client-state as the weaker of the two nations (Carney 1989). Often the client-state is a developing nation seeking developmental assistance through a strategic 'give and take' relationship with a patron (Carney 1989). Client-states will often display relatively uniform characteristics, in that they have an asymmetrical dependence on the patron-state (Kaufman 1974). It is common for a client-state to commit to supporting the agenda of a patron-state even to its detriment, again demonstrating an asymmetrical relationship (Scott 1972; Veenendaal 2017). The client-states obedience to the patron is beneficial in two ways, foremost it improves the material and physical wellbeing of its citizens, and secondly, it enhances the client-states domestic agenda and legitimacy (Carney 1989). However, Carney (1989) theorised that a client's support of a patron could signal to the citizens of the client-state that its government is losing autonomy and control (Carney 1989).

### **2.1.4 The dynamics of a Patron-Client Relationship**

The dynamics of a patron-client relationship can, thus, be seen as a reciprocal relationship built on the foundation of asymmetrical resources and power (Kaufman 1974; Carney 1989). The durability of patron-client relations suggests that a particular level of affectivity evolves throughout time (Stein 1984). The pairing of affectivity and asymmetry creates the foundation of what Wolf (1966) refers to as a lopsided friendship. The durability of patron-client relations means that overtime personal relationships are formed, and the countries leadership can become interlinked and interdependent (Stein 1984). Personal relationships between officials from patron and client countries become core mechanisms to sustain the partnership (Stein 1984).

The role of compliance is also fundamental to the sustainment of patron-client relations (Carney 1989). A patron-state expects the client to comply with its arrangement by supporting its strategic and economic interests internationally (Carney 1989). Whereas, a client-state expects compliance by the patron in the form of economic advancements and securitisation (Carney 1989).



## 2.2 Critiques of Patron-Client Theory

As this study seeks to apply the theory of patron-client to the case study of China and Cambodia, it is useful to explore prominent critiques of this application in an attempt to acknowledge and account for any limitations. John Ciorciari (2013, 2015) argues that there are both strategic and normative factors that show China's inability to cultivate durable patron-client pacts in Southeast Asia. Ciorciari (2013, 2015) states that as a result of Chinese Foreign Policy, the Chinese approach to patron-client relationships has distinctive characteristics, that differ from traditional patron-client pacts.

Foremost, Southeast Asia's historical primacy to the U.S. has seen many nations in the region enter pro-US security alignments (Ciorciari 2015). Many countries in the Southeast Asian region, view the U.S. as a distant presence which is capable of offering security when required (Ciorciari 2015). Whereas, China is often regarded with caution, with many leaders and citizens still suspicious of China's sponsorship of local Communist movements during the Cold War era (Ciorciari 2015). Ciorciari also sees limits in China's ability to nurture client-states as China's 'charm offensive' is the notion that China will be neither a threatening foe nor an overbearing partner (Ciorciari 2015).

In alignment with the Principles of Peaceful Coexistence, China is more likely to cultivate less intrusive forms of patron-client relationships than the traditional model, according to Ciorciari (2015). Chinese foreign policy emphasises sovereignty and non-interference, characteristics that contrast many patron-client pacts that the U.S. and Soviet Union have held/hold (Ciorciari 2015).

Specifically, Ciorciari explores the application of patron-client to China and Cambodia. Chinese patronage is evident in the forms of economic investment, political protection and strategically timed military support (Ciorciari 2013,2015). Cambodian clientelism can be seen through access to resources, diplomatic and political support and a voice in ASEAN (Ciorciari 2015). However, in light of this, Ciorciari argues there is no benefit to the growth of Sino-Cambodian relations (Ciorciari 2013, 2015). He claims that the relationship between China and Cambodia has the potential to alienate Cambodia from the ASEAN community (Ciorciari 2015). Whereas for China, fostering a tighter relationship with Cambodia could strain other foreign ties and provoke international criticism, as many other nations have been openly critical of the Hun Sen administration (Ciorciari 2015).

China has ample incentives to provide weaker partners in Southeast Asia with economic support, including the construction of the BRI (Ciorciari 2015; Rana and Ji 2020). However, this financial patronage is underpinned by a different model than traditional donorship (Sato et al. 2010). According to Ciorciari (2013, 2015) under The Principles of Peaceful Coexistence, China frames itself as a neutral power without alliances, therefore rather than cultivating client-states, it accumulates connections with other nations through incentives (Ciorciari 2015). Therefore, according to Ciorciari, China has established a distinctive model of patron-client relations that aligns with the normative commitments that the nation is consistent with, known as the ‘Chinese Model’ (Ciorciari 2015).

### **2.3 How does this study vary from Ciorciari's Critique?**

This study has acknowledged and accounted for the criticisms put forth by Ciorciari (2013, 2015) regarding the application of patron-client theory to China and Cambodia.

Foremost, Ciorciari's (2013, 2015) studies were conducted prior to pivotal changes in the relationship between China and Southeast Asia. Most notably, the establishment of the multilateral financial institution, the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) in January of 2016, which amplified China's position within Southeast Asia (Yu 2017). The AIIB, which all 10 ASEAN states are members of, has allowed for a Chinese-led infrastructure boom across Southeast Asia, including US\$1.7 billion in loans the year of its establishment (Guild 2017). Knowingly the immense affect the establishment of AIIB would have on the financial structure of the world and in particular the United States position in Southeast Asia, the U.S. attempted (unsuccessfully) to freeze it out in 2015 (Guild 2017). However, as a result, the U.S. excluded itself from what is becoming an immense contributor to the rise and influence of China in Southeast Asia (Guild 2017). This has dramatically affected the U.S.'s significance in Southeast Asia and therefore challenges Ciorciari's (2013, 2015) theory that Southeast Asian nations will continue to preference the U.S. over China. This study will vary from Ciorciari's critique to assess whether the establishment of the AIIB has altered the economic relationship between the U.S. and Cambodia, and if so, has Cambodia's economic relationship with China increased.

Furthermore, The United States presence in Southeast Asia has also substantially dwindled under the Trump administration (Guild 2017). In 2017, on President Trump's first day in office, he signed an executive order withdrawing the U.S. from the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) (Duffy 2017). The TPP, a regional trade bloc designed in an attempt to move the Asia-

Pacific region away from China, was one of the main economic pillars of the Obama administration (Duffy 2017). The withdrawal from TPP was heavily criticised, with Republican Senator John McCain stating “it will create an opening for China to rewrite the economic rules of the road at the expense of American workers. And it will send a troubling signal of American disengagement in the Asia-Pacific region at a time we can least afford it” (McCain in Smith 2017). In the same year, Trump’s budget proposal saw complete neglect for overseas infrastructure investment, including a 50% cut to funding for the Asian Development Bank (Guild 2017). This budgetary cut has opened up infrastructure investment opportunities in Southeast Asia, even more so. With the announcement of BRI in 2013, the Trump administration’s decision to cut overseas infrastructure funding has allowed China to fill its place. The decisions made by the U.S. Trump administration demonstrated a lack of commitment to Southeast Asia, ceding power to China (Guild 2017). The actions of the Trump administration, therefore, do not align with Ciorciari’s theory that the U.S. will remain the preferred foreign superpower in Southeast Asia. In October of 2017, at China’s 19<sup>th</sup> Party Congress, President Xi Jinping made it clear that China was moving towards a ‘new era’ in which it would fill the position of the U.S. by becoming “closer to centre stage and making greater contributions to mankind” (Guild 2017). The growing uncertainty of the U.S. position in Southeast Asia and China’s increasing commitment to the region has reduced initial scepticism held by Southeast Asian nations regarding China (Barbesgaard et al. 2019). Therefore, this study’s application of patron-client in the case of China and Cambodia varies from Ciorciari’s ‘Chinese Model’ as contextual conditions have meant that there has been a significant hindrance to the U.S.’s relationship with Southeast Asia. In response to these changes, this study will assess how China has used the U.S.’s weakening position in Southeast Asia, to exert further influence and expand the scope of BRI.

In conjunction with the U.S. lack of presence in Southeast Asia, China's 'charm offensive', has become particularly intriguing for anti-democratic regimes across Southeast Asia. The idea that China will not hold nations to democratic standards and good governance has become appealing to those nations expressing a 'third-wave of authoritarianism' (Shin 2008). The sustainment or revert to anti-democratic/hybrid practices in the Philippines, South Korea, Thailand, Mongolia and Cambodia have capitalised on China's investment, and non-interference policies (Shin 2008). This study therefore, will analyse how China's 'charm offensive' benefits the Hun Sen's regime.

Whilst this study agrees with Ciorciari (2013, 2015) criticisms that Chinese foreign policy of non-interference means China has less intrusive actions than a traditional patron, this study will look at how this policy still affects the internal politics of the recipient country. Acknowledging the validity of this criticism, this study will demonstrate how the growing presence of China and therefore, the lack of 'intrusive' donors, subsequently affects the internal politics of the recipient nations.

This study's application of patron-client acknowledges Ciorciari's (2013, 2015) criticism that there is no benefit to China or Cambodia entrenching its relationship further. However, through the essential role of Cambodia in the BRI and China's fundamental role in providing Cambodia with aid and investment in lieu of the U.S. and EU, it is evident that despite shortcomings its relationship continues to perpetuate. Ciorciari (2013) observation that further Sino-Cambodian relations would strain Cambodia's relationship with ASEAN nations and that China's support of the Hun Sen administration would trigger international criticism have proven right. However, their relationship continues to propel regardless of these implications.

This thesis will vary from Ciorciari's theory that China and Cambodian relations will not further by seeking to determine the patron-state's objective.

Ultimately, this thesis aligns with Ciorciari's (2013, 2015) argument that China cultivates different relationships than traditional donors or patron-states. Therefore, the concept of a 'Chinese Model' to patron-client relationships put forth by Ciorciari (2013, 2015) will be adopted throughout this study, in accordance with the variations established above. The way in which Chinese foreign aid is described to hold 'Chinese characteristics', so too does the way in which it holds and cultivates patron-client networks (Brautigam 2011; Ciorciari 2013, 2015). The following section outlines the contributions this thesis makes to the theory of patron-client and how it builds upon the framework of a 'Chinese Model'.

## **2.4 The Theoretical Contribution of this Study**

This thesis will adopt the 'Chinese Model' variant to patron-client relations, particularly between China and Southeast Asian nations (Ciorciari 2015). The theoretical contribution of this thesis seeks to build upon the 'Chinese Model' and depict how Cambodia is a client-state to China but with variations specific to how China operates bilaterally with Southeast Asian nations (Ciorciari 2013).

Foremost, this paper aims to contribute to the theory of patron-client by analysing the different levels in which this relationship can exist. Utilising China and Cambodia's relationship, this contribution will seek to demonstrate how patron-client relationships can occur on the level of the political party rather than the state-level. Through analysing Cambodia and China, this thesis will illustrate the relationship that exists between the Cambodian People's Party (CPP) and the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). Through

developing an understanding party-to-party patron client relations between the CPP and the CCP, this will contribute insights into the extent to which Chinese influence has contributed to the demise of Cambodian democracy.

This thesis will then demonstrate how the three objectives of a patron-state (ideological convergence, international solidarity and strategic advantage) outlined by Shoemaker and Spanier (1984) are reinforcing of one another. This contribution will show how the reinforcing behaviours exhibited by patron and client states indirectly result in ideological convergence.

Finally, through analysing patron-client theory in application to China and Cambodia, this paper will demonstrate how political rhetoric and economic patronage become interlinked. Drawing on scholars such as Marshall & Chan-Thul (2013), this paper will endeavour to measure how the economic support given to Cambodia by the Chinese government has strengthened Cambodia's domestic regime, reducing its dependency on traditional donors. This will demonstrate that while the objective of the Chinese government may not be the ideological convergence of Cambodia, that the effect of the 'Chinese-Model' has allowed the CPP to strengthen its authoritative position.

The following chapter will outline the research methodology, process tracing, and how it will be implemented within this study.

## CHAPTER 3

### DESIGNING THE METHODOLOGY

#### 3.1 Process Tracing

Process tracing is a case study research method used to achieve qualitative results (Collier 2011). For this study, process tracing will involve "the systematic examination of diagnostic evidence selected and analysed in light of research questions and hypotheses posed by the investigator" (Collier 2011 p.823). Causal mechanisms are "portable concepts that explain how and why a hypothesised cause, in a given context, contributes to a particular outcome" (Falleti & Lynch 2009 p.1143). Process tracing allows the researcher to systemically evaluate the legitimacy and accuracy of the causal mechanisms present (Falleti & Lynch 2009).

Process tracing involves evaluating the trajectories of change and the probability of causation and to do so relies on the researcher's ability to describe related factors (Collier 2011). Collier (2011) states the importance of indicators and parameters when describing an event or causal mechanisms within the process tracing map. Process tracing allows the researcher to distinguish correlation from causation by practising descriptive inference, meaning the ability to view events singularly and within a sequence of events (Collier 2011).

#### 3.2 Implementing Process Tracing

The first stage of process tracing is to identify the testable hypotheses. Process tracing requires the hypotheses to be juxtaposed and tested against rival explanations that are theoretically grounded (Hall 2013). Lakatos (1970) in Hall (2013), describes this method as creating a three-cornered fight which tests observations, against your hypotheses and alternative explanations to ensure credibility and unbiased research results.



The hypotheses for this study are:

1. Economic patronage from China to Cambodia has contributed to PM Hun Sen and the CPP's concentration of power.
2. Cambodia's increased alignment with China allows PM Hun Sen to ignore international criticism and sanctions imposed on Cambodia as a result of the CPP's infringement on democratic freedoms.

The alternative explanation is:

1. Chinese aid and investment have aided Cambodia's development. However, PM Hun Sen's concentration of power is predominantly the result of the CPP's systematic breakdown of democratic institutions and entrenched political corruption.

The second stage of process tracing involves establishing a timeline and sequence of events. The conclusion of the timeframe should be after the dependent variable is known (Ricks and Liu 2018). Researchers often find it challenging to identify a starting point; therefore, a timeline should endeavour to begin at "the emergence of the theorised causal variable" (Ricks & Liu 2018 p.4).

The timeline of this study begins with 'the theorised causal variable' that being an increase of Chinese patronage in Cambodia from 2010. Starting the study in 2010 demonstrates how the Comprehensive Partnership of Cooperation Agreement altered the relationship between China and Cambodia. In January of 2010, China and Cambodia's economic relationship was also amplified through the ASEAN-China Free Trade Agreement (Pheakdey 2012). The establishment of the ASEAN-China Free Trade Agreement meant the average tariff rate on a

Chinese product sold in Cambodia (or another ASEAN nation) decreased from 12.8% to 0.6% and the average tariff on ASEAN products sold in China went from 9.8% to 0.1% (Devonshire-Ellis 2014).

The Comprehensive Partnership of Cooperation and ASEAN-China Trade Agreement formed an environment conducive to PM Hun Sen's concentration of power in preparation for the 2013 Cambodian General Election (Chheang 2017, Leng 2017 & Peou 2019). In 2012 Cambodia displayed its first largescale international act of solidarity with China through supporting China's South China Sea position at the ASEAN Summit (Reeves 2013). In 2012 the CPP became concerned that the Cambodian National Rescue Party (CNRP), the main opposition party, posed a legitimate threat to the regime in the upcoming elections (Chheang 2017). To combat the risk of the CNRP, the CPP in 2012 began to impose a range of approaches to weaken democratic rights within Cambodia (Leng 2017; Pheakdey 2012).

Therefore, this study will commence in 2010 as this period demonstrates an acceleration of Sino-Cambodia economic, social and political ties, alongside an intensified breakdown of democracy in Cambodia. The study's timeframe will conclude with the 2018 Cambodian General Election. The 2018 Cambodian General Election was illegitimate after the CNRP was effectively dissolved by the CPP (Bhattacharjee 2018). Despite the enrolment of twenty registered political parties, it was evident that these parties did not pose a legitimate threat to the CPP (Bhattacharjee 2018). International spectators pronounced the election a 'sham' with Morgenbesser, stating that "he [Hun Sen] pushed his regime from competitive authoritarianism to full-blown 'hegemonic' authoritarian rule" (Morgenbesser 2019 p.159).

The third stage of process tracing involves constructing causal diagrams (Waldner 2015 in Ricks & Liu 2018). Causal diagrams provide structure in identifying the causal mechanisms and the concerned outcome (Ricks and Liu 2018).

**Figure 2: Causal Diagram (Hypothesis 1)**

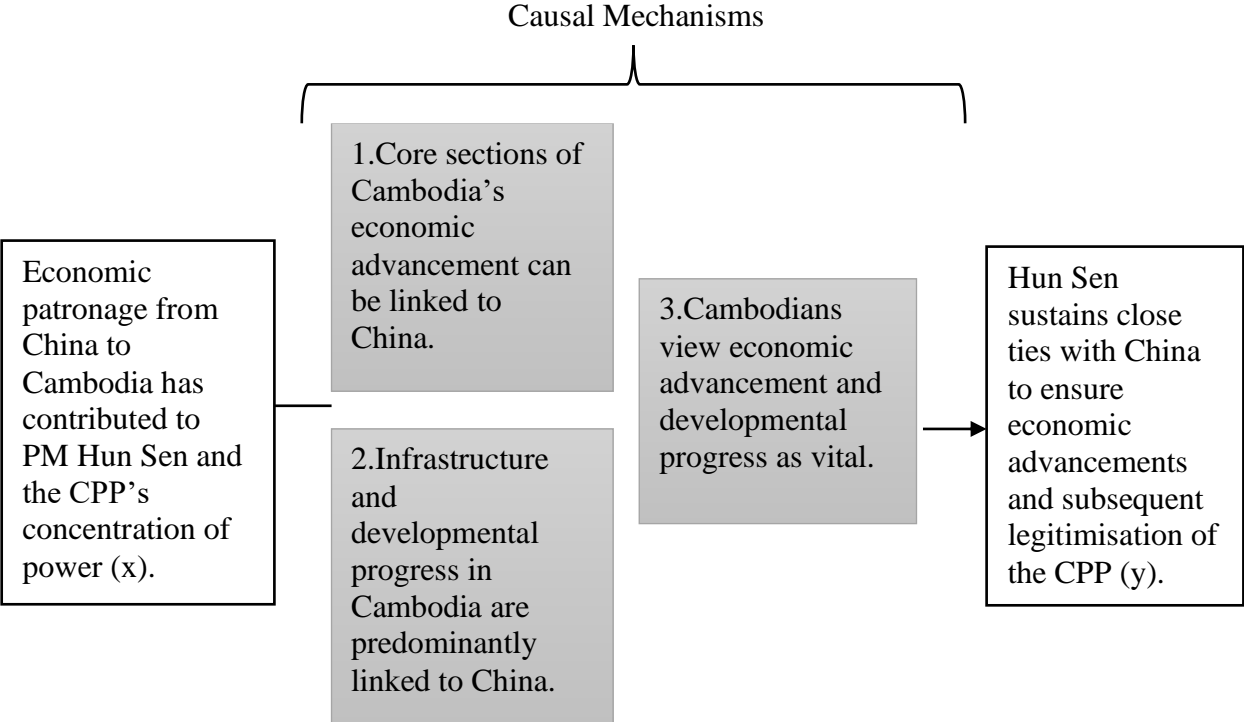


Figure 2 links the economic patronage China has provided Cambodia to PM Hun Sen's concentration of power. According to the literature, the economic development of Cambodia in recent years has given the Hun Sen administration a sense of legitimacy validating his political longevity (Ciorciari 2015 p.253, 254).

**Figure 3: Causal Diagram (Hypothesis 2)**

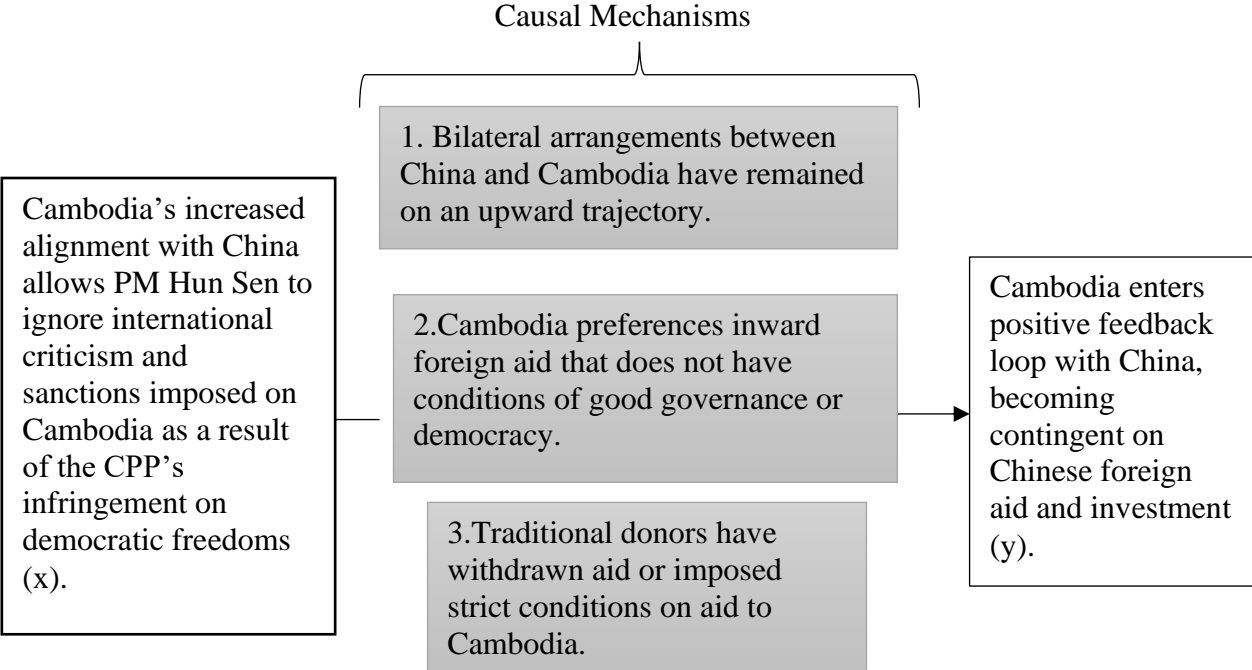
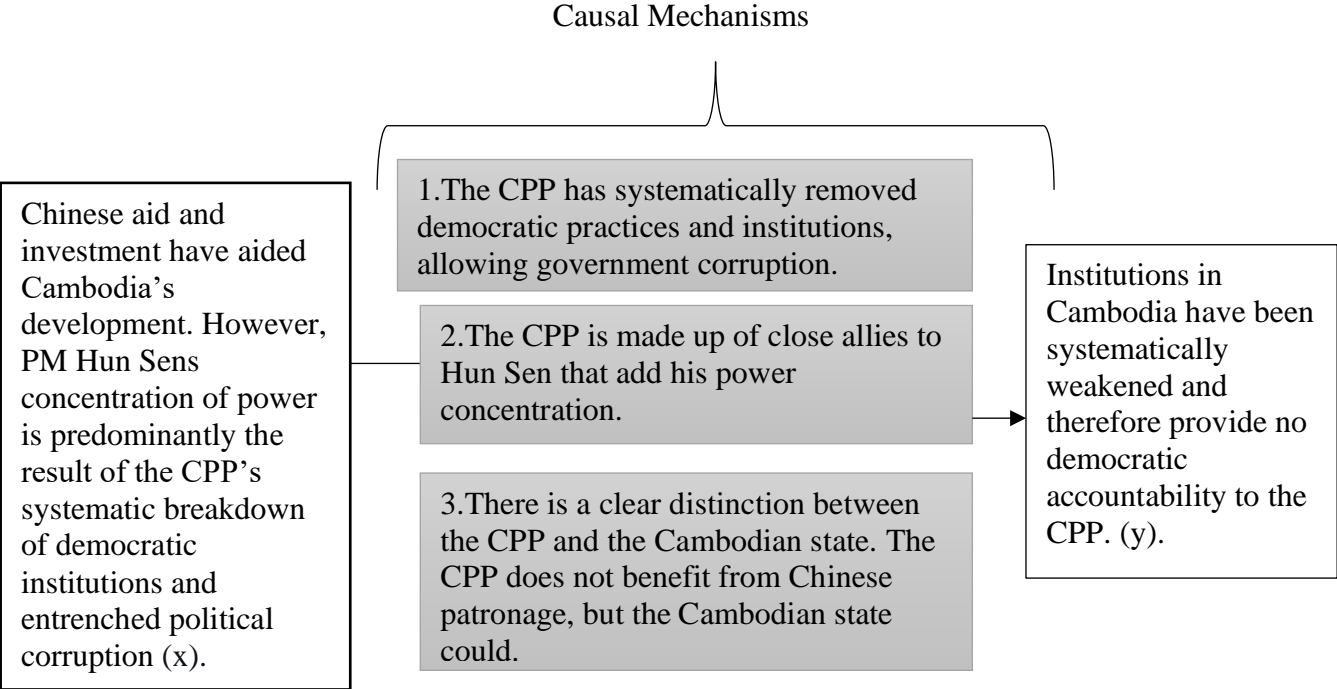


Figure 3 depicts a positive feedback loop in which the relationship between China and Cambodia has effectively alienated Cambodia from alternate sources of finance and protection.

The next stage of process tracing involves identifying an alternative explanation of why Cambodian democracy deteriorated (Ricks & Liu 2018). Step five involves identifying counterfactual results, had those choices or activities transpired (Ricks & Liu 2018). Figure 4 combines stages four and five to outline the alternative causal mechanisms and the outcome that would be expected.

**Figure 4: Causal Diagram (Alternative Explanation)**



The alternative explanation outlined in Figure 4 looks at the decline of democracy in Cambodia as a result of rampant corruption, lack of transparency and a systematic breakdown of institutions. Extensive literature suggests that Hun Sen's administration is made up of family members and close allies that work to sustain the regime (Lim 2017). PM Hun Sen has gone to great lengths to cover his family's political and economic entrenchment (Lim 2017). Scholars believe the murder of Kem Ley, a Cambodian journalist, was due to his exposure of Sen's links to vast patronage networks, decades of nepotism and carefully arranged marriages with political and economic elite (Lim 2017).

The next step involves operationalising the causal mechanisms by outlining the types of empirical evidence that would be present if the causal agents were present or vacant. Below an Expected Evidence Figure and Weighted Evidence Figure showcases this.

**Figure 5: Expected Evidence**

<b>Causal Mechanism</b>	<b>Expected empirical evidence</b>
<p>Core sections of Cambodia's economic advancement link to China.</p>	<p><u>Supports H1</u>            China's engagement appears to have been economically significant to Cambodia – this significance outweighs other countries.</p> <p>Evidence that demonstrates that Cambodia could not have made substantial economic growth without China.</p> <p><u>Does not support hypothesis</u>            Another country provided more aid and loans to Cambodia during the 2010-18 period.</p> <p>Evidence suggests that the aid and loans provided to Cambodia by China did not substantially change its economic growth.</p>
<p>Infrastructure and developmental progress in Cambodia are predominantly linked to China.</p>	<p><u>Supports H1</u>            Evidence that infrastructure projects in Cambodia between 2010-18 have been financed predominantly by China.</p> <p>Evidence that Chinese designed, built and funded infrastructure in Cambodia, aligned to China's strategic plan (i.e. BRI).</p> <p>Specific SEZ are designed to enhance Chinese infrastructure and development projects. These SEZ demonstrate a preference and prioritisation of Chinese FDI.</p> <p><u>Does not support hypothesis</u>            China's financed and designed infrastructure and development projects are minimal.</p> <p>The Cambodian government funds the majority of infrastructure projects in the country.</p>
<p>Cambodians view economic advancement and developmental progress as vital.</p>	<p><u>Supports H1</u>            Evidence such as media articles and polls suggest Cambodians value economic advancement and developmental progress as essential.</p> <p>Economic advancement has been explicitly framed as a result of the CPP longevity, ergo providing the party with legitimacy.</p> <p>Hun Sen affirms through press releases and speeches that economic growth and development is a result of the CPP and that other political parties would lower Cambodia's developmental progress.</p> <p><u>Does not support hypothesis</u></p>

	<p>No evidence or evidence to the contrary suggests Cambodians value economic and development growth as a critical priority. Evidence that the CPP does not mention its role in economic growth.</p>
<p>Bilateral arrangements between China and Cambodia have remained on an upward trajectory.</p>	<p><u>Supports H2</u>  Evidence that the connection between Cambodia and China has increased throughout 2010-2018.</p> <p><u>Does not support hypothesis</u>  Points of conflict or withdrawal have been present in Cambodia’s and China’s relationship.</p> <p>Cambodia and China’s bilateral relationship is decreasing.</p>
<p>Cambodia preferences inward foreign aid that does not have conditions of good governance or democracy.</p>	<p><u>Supports H2</u>  Evidence that Cambodia has seen a decrease in conditional loans between 2010-2018.</p> <p>Evidence that the majority of foreign aid and investment in Cambodia comes from sources that do not hold a standard of good governance or democracy.</p> <p><u>Does not support hypothesis</u>  Chinese aid and FDI does not require the usual conditions set forth for traditional donors i.e. good governance.</p> <p>Cambodia relies more on another nation for aid and FDI than its reliance on China.</p>
<p>Traditional donors have withdrawn aid or imposed strict conditions on aid to Cambodia.</p>	<p><u>Supports H2</u>  Evidence that traditional donors have withdrawn aid, investment and/or trade preferences to Cambodia.</p> <p>Evidence that Cambodia’s democratic breakdown has meant traditional donors are imposing strict regulations on the nation.</p> <p>Traditional donor’s foreign aid and investment is predominantly linked to conditions of democracy.</p> <p><u>Does not support hypothesis</u>  Nothing has changed in Cambodia’s relations with traditional donors between 2010-2018.</p>

**Figure 6: Weighted Evidence**

Implications	Hypothesis 1	Hypothesis 2	Alternative Explanation	Evidentiary value if observed	Evidentiary value if not observed
Core sections of Cambodia's economic advancement can be linked to China.	Required	Likely	Unlikely	Highly favourable of the hypothesis as it would demonstrate an asymmetric dependence.	Unfavourable against the theory as economic dependence demonstrates a core feature of patron-client theory and the hypothesis.
Infrastructure and developmental progress in Cambodia are predominantly linked to China.	Required	Likely	Unlikely	Highly favourable of the hypothesis shows the CPP's need for Chinese patronage. It is damaging to rival.	Moderately damaging to the hypothesis, reasonably supportive to rival.
Cambodians view economic advancement and developmental progress as vital.	Required	Likely	Unlikely	Highly supportive of the hypothesis, links economic growth to the voter base.	Dependent on the results of the first two implications. Is supportive of rival claims if economic growth is not linked to China, or vice versa.
Cambodia preferences inward foreign aid that does not have conditions of good governance or democracy.	Required	Required	Not present	Highly favourable of hypothesis, shows a clear reason for China and Cambodia's increased relationship.	Significantly reduces likelihood of hypothesis.
Bilateral arrangements between China and Cambodia have remained on an upward trajectory.	Likely	Required	Irrelevant	Moderately favourable as it shows a reinforcing relationship.	Moderately damaging to hypothesis; neutral to alternative explanations.
Traditional donors have withdrawn aid or imposed strict conditions on aid to Cambodia.	Likely	Required	Not present	Supports both H1 and H2 as it demonstrates economic dependence and the distancing of other nations.	Substantially damaging as it would suggest Cambodia does not depend on China in place of other nations aid and FDI.



The CPP is made up of close allies to Hun Sen that add his power concentration.	Irrelevant	Probable but not required	Required	Neutral to the hypothesis, highly supportive of the alternative explanation.	Highly damaging to alternative theory; indifference to hypotheses
The CPP has systematically removed democratic practices and institutions, allowing government corruption.	Likely	Likely	Required	Relatively supportive to alternative theory; but also supportive to both hypotheses.	Very damaging to rival theory, relatively unrelated to hypotheses.
There is a clear distinction between the CPP and the Cambodian State. The CPP does not benefit from Chinese patronage, but the Cambodian State could.	Highly unlikely	Highly unlikely	Required	Damages alternative theory, highly favourable for the H1 and H2.	Highly favourable for hypotheses, disproves rival.

The final stage of process tracing is to design how data will be collected and charted to ensure credibility and objective results (Ricks and Liu 2018). This involves creating indicators and parameters to systematically map evidence for both your hypotheses and rival explanation (Ricks and Liu 2018).

### **3.3 Indicators and parameters of this study**

The parameters below demonstrate the selection and classification process of this study.

The acts and events which will be analysed throughout the process tracing must align to one or more of Beetham (2004) 'generic' and 'specific' subversions of democratic rights.

Beetham (2004) outlines four generic modes of subversion, which include:

1. Judicial process inadequacies, i.e. corruption or systematic obstacles to appeal (Beetham 2004)
2. Arbitrary policing, i.e. maltreatment in police custody or threatening protesters (Beetham 2004)
3. Use of emergency powers to circumnavigate judicial safeguards (Beetham 2004)
4. Systematic exclusion of particular groups (Beetham 2004)

Beetham (2004) further outlines five specific modes of subversion, which include:

1. Threats to the security of the person, i.e. assault or murder by civilians to make the nation unsafe (Beetham 2004)
2. Extreme levels of abuse and deaths in custody. This aligns with Winston Churchill's sentiment that 'how prisoners are treated is a good litmus test of democracy's quality' (Beetham 2004 p.67).

3. Limits to freedom of expression, i.e. media ownership concentration, defamation laws, threats or abuse to journalists (Beetham 2004)
4. Restrictions on the freedom of association, i.e. the exclusion of political parties (Beetham 2004)
5. Improperly restricting access to certain information, i.e. restrictive official secrets legislation (Beetham 2004).

The use of Beetham 2004 generic and specific subversions of democratic rights will ensure consistency through the selection of events which will contribute to the study.

This study will also sort data with distinctions between the Chinese State, the Chinese Communist Party and Chinese private enterprise. Chinese influence will be determined when a form of patronage occurs in close succession with one of Beetham (2004) generic or specific subversions of democracy.

### **3.4 Addressing Research and Instrument Bias**

It is critical to acknowledge the inherent biases within the theoretical and methodological approach of this research. Adopting a patron-client framework means this research is subject to viewing China and Cambodia through a bi-polar lens. This bias has been managed through using a comparative approach throughout the study. This involves comparing China to other donors, and Cambodia to other ASEAN nations.

To ensure the credibility of the process-tracing results, this thesis has used Collier (2011) and Ricks & Liu (2018) structured approaches to implement the methodology. Within the research method, subjectivity has been managed by implementing strict indicators and parameters throughout. Indicators and parameters ensure that the research is consistent, and the ways in which to collect and measure data have been justified.

Within this, it is also vital to acknowledge and manage biases the researcher brings to the design of the study. In this, it is noted that the mere act of observation and reporting findings involves the researcher interpreting the results (Sanders 2010). Furthermore, the nature of the study and limited access to data has influenced the study's ability to uncover objective facts about the world. Therefore, as the researcher, I am unable to verify the validity or falsify; ultimately, I will rely on the scrutiny of other scholars.

The key research findings will be discussed over the following three chapters – 'Party-to-Party Patronage', 'The Objectives of a Patron-State are Reinforcing' and 'Political Rhetoric and Chinese Economic Patronage'. The following chapter, chapter 4, will demonstrate how CPP has moved away from traditional aid donors and instead has formed party-to-party networks with the CCP.

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **PARTY-TO-PARTY PATRONAGE**

China differs from a traditional donor and a conventional patron-state through its foreign policy of ‘non-interference’. This chapter will explore how the pre-requisite of ‘political stability’ in an aid-recipient country is circumnavigated through the ‘Chinese Model’ to party-to-party patron-client relationships.

#### **4.1 Political Stability**

Political stability describes reliable government structures and institutions that allow for a regular and predictable pattern of behaviour to form, for example, the stability of election terms (Dowding & Kimber 1983). Political stability reduces the likelihood of destructive and violent events, whilst also ensuring it has the mechanisms to cope with them if they were to arise (Dowding & Kimber 1983). For a developed nation, political stability or the promise of reform by the recipient nation, is often essential to encourage outward foreign direct investment (FDI), trade preferences and international strategic pursuits, as it excludes risk (Kurecic & Kokotovic 2017).

#### **4.2 Political Stability and Traditional Donors**

Political stability can be achieved through aid foremost, as it promotes economic and social development, meaning the populous becomes better educated and therefore more likely to seek self-determination through stable democratic institutions (Lipset 1959 in Kersting & Kilby 2014). Traditional donors will also often use aid to directly fund institutional development within the recipient’s government and civil society, this is known as democratic aid (Kersting & Kilby 2014). Finally, in an absence of political stability or where it is weak,

donors may use aid as leverage for democratic reform, creating conditional aid (Nelson 1992; Kersting & Kilby 2014). Consistency in this approach often sees traditional donors reacting to the internal politics of recipient nations if conditions are not upheld. Traditional donors frequently respond to democratic breakdown or human right abuses in recipient countries by restricting tourism, not recognising election results, suspending developmental assistance and withdrawing trade preferences (Nielsen 2013). This is emblematic of a ‘Carrot and Stick’ aid policy which operates through reward and punishment measures to achieve the desired outcome (Palda 1993). This relationship has been documented extensively between Cambodia and traditional donors, namely the U.S. and EU during the 2010 – 2018 period.

With the dissolution of the CNRP in late 2017, both the U.S. and EU withdrew funding for the 2018 General Election. In response to democratic breakdowns and human right abuses in 2018 alone the U.S. and EU imposed the following withdrawals:

**Figure 7: Cambodian General Election & The United States Response 2018**

Date	Action
27/02	The U.S. stopped/reduced aid programs to Cambodia totalling US\$8.3 million in response to “recent setbacks in democracy”.
13/06	The U.S. imposed sanctions on General Hing Bun Hieng, head of the Prime Minister Bodyguard Unit for having connections to incidents in which military force was used.
25/07	U.S. Congress passed the Cambodia Democracy Act imposing “sanctions on all members of Hun Sen’s inner circle for their role in undermining democracy in Cambodia and committing serious human rights violations”.
15/08	U.S. announces visa restrictions for individuals “within and outside the Cambodian government” responsible for “the most notable anti-democratic actions taken in the run-up to the flawed July 29 election”.

Sources: Lynn 2018, Chan-Thul 2018, Human Rights Watch 2019, Meixler 2018.

**Figure 8: Cambodian General Election & The European Union’s Response2018**

Date	Action
20/02	The EU’s 28 foreign ministers threaten to impose sanctions and begin the process of suspending trade preferences to Cambodia as a result of recent democratic breakdowns.
01/07 – for several weeks.	The European Commission deploys a research group to Cambodia to assess the nations compliance with human right standards.
05/10	EU Trade Commissioner Cecilia Malmstrom notified Cambodia that the EU was launching the process to withdraw trade preferences to Cambodia.

Sources: Reuters 2018, European Commission 2018, Krishnan & Rathavong 2018.

Figure 7 and Figure 8 demonstrate how traditional donors will cease their relationship with recipient nations that do not abide by the conditions of democratisation and good governance established through the conditions placed on aid and trade. However, this ‘Carrot and Stick’ approach to aid, does not account for ‘rogue donor(s)’ such as China (Naim in Kersting & Kilby 2014).

**4.3 Political Stability and China**

In the absence of U.S. and EU financial backing, the Hun Sen administration receives Chinese developmental assistance, ultimately shifting reliance to a financier that does not require the same types of democratic conditions. Rather than conditional aid, China forms tied aid, this aligns with its Principles for Peaceful Coexistence, that emphasises non-interference in other nations domestic practices and a focus on national interests (Zongze 2006). After the U.S. and EU withdrew funding to the 2018 General Elections in late 2017, China issued a statement that it would provide equipment to facilitate the Cambodian General Election including ballot boxes and booths (Allard & Chan-Thul 2018; Reuters 2018).

In 2018 when the U.S., EU and other traditional donors withdrew funding to and imposed sanctions on Cambodia, China responded by;

**Figure 9: Cambodian General Election & China’s Response 2018**

Date	Action
19/06	China pledges US\$100 million to Cambodia in military aid.
10/07	China lends Cambodia US\$259 million in concessional loans to construct a new road.
Prior 29/07	Xiong Bo condemns the EU’s proposed sanctions on Cambodia.
11/07	U.S. cybersecurity firm releases report that Chinese espionage group ‘TEMP.Periscope’ has targeted Cambodian opposition leaders, government departments and media outlets ahead of the General Election.
Prior 29/07	Sends ‘election observers’ to verify Cambodia to oversee General Election.

Sources: Elmer 2018, Reuters 2018, Allard & Chan-Thul 2018, Seriff 2018, Tan & Preece 2018.

Unlike traditional donors, China cultivates the insurance of stability through different mechanisms. To ensure reliability and predictability in Cambodia’s actions, China has formed party-to-party patron-client and diplomatic relations that provide predictability and therefore stability. Generational interlinkages have been formed between the CCP and CPP to ensure that while Cambodia may be an unreliable recipient to traditional donors, its relationship with China remains consistent. The role of The International Department of the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP/ID) is critical to understanding the existence of China’s party-to-party relationships (Shambaugh 2007). The CCP/ID operates worldwide and throughout China to perform various functions for the CCP and government (Shambaugh 2007). The main function of the ID is not at the state-to-state level, however its principal



responsibility is to maintain and develop party-to-party relations with various political parties worldwide (Shambaugh 2007).

The following section therefore will discuss how and why the CCP and CPP have formed party-to-party dynamics.

#### **4.4 CCP and CPP, Party-to-Party Patronage?**

The CCP and CPP's patron-client relationship is embedded in historical roots, with the Chinese government legitimising PM Hun Sen through economic patronage since the beginning of his leadership (Chheang 2017). However, these party-to-party relations have only amplified with time.

In 2010 through the establishment of the Comprehensive Strategic Partnership of Cooperation, the CCP and CPP laid the foundations for their party-to-party cooperation that would strengthen Chinese investment throughout the country (Heder 2011). The partnership agreement embedded the role of China within Cambodia's path to development. In 2012, the party-to-party relationship between the CCP and CPP was internationally showcased at the ASEAN Summit (Un 2013). Prominent academic, Thitinan Pongsudhirak (2012), stated that Cambodia's band-wagoning of China at the ASEAN Summit demonstrated that "China has become an open patron state of Phnom Penh" (Pongsudhirak 2012). As chairman of the ASEAN Summit, Cambodia, effectively refused to issue a joint communique for the first time in ASEAN's 45-year history, as it contained criticism towards China's actions in regard to the South China Sea dispute (Po & Primiano 2020). Beijing then promised Cambodia US\$523 million in loans and grants, the day after Chinese PM Wen Jiabao praised Cambodia for helping China continue 'friendly relations' with the ASEAN community (Um 2013 p.148). Within the same year, Cambodia hosted CCP officials President Hu Jintao and Premier Wen

Jiabao, in which pronouncements regarding new trade and aid agreements were made following each trip (Un 2013).

Party-to-party connections between the CCP and CPP were strengthened in 2013 when the CNRP came close to winning the 2013 General Election (Allard & Chan-Thul 2018). Thayer in Allard & Chan-Thul 2018 stated “the Chinese found this unsettling and told Hun Sen that they wanted stability” continuing by stating “China is now heavily invested in the CPP, and the reverse is also true”. This was demonstrated throughout 2013 with numerous trips made by CCP and CPP officials between China and Cambodia, including PM Hun Sen in April (Demetrianova 2016). The announcement of the Belt and Road Initiative and Cambodia’s instant band-wagoning of the project in 2013 again demonstrated the CPP’s willingness to exhibit international solidarity with China (Demetrianova 2016).

A similar pattern was demonstrated in 2016 when ASEAN was unable to reach agreement on the South China Sea again, after Cambodia blocked mention of the international court ruling against China within its statement (Blanchard 2016). Notably, this was only the second time ASEAN was unable to issue a statement after a meeting, both as a result of the CPP’s support of China’s stance on the South China Sea (Blanchard 2016). A week after Cambodia supported China’s agenda at the ASEAN Summit, China announced an additional US\$600 million aid package to Cambodia (Po & Var 2017). Party-to-party interactions were further exhibited again in 2016 with PM Hun Sen experiencing two major setbacks within his government, that being; the CPP’s struggle to consolidate power and a growing discontentment across the middle-class towards the CPP (Leng 2017). These issues of legitimacy faced by PM Hun Sen were quelled by CCP support (O’Neill 2017). To address the dissatisfaction of the middle-class China agreed to Cambodia’s request to increase the

quota of rice exports from 100,000 to 200,000 tones (Leng 2017). In doing so, the employment opportunities to middle-income earners doubled, demonstrating how the CPP can look after its needs through party-to-party relations with the CCP (Leng 2017). In October of 2016 31 cooperation agreements, including memorandums of understanding pertaining to loans, trade and the construction of power plants, were also established, further embedding the patron-client dynamic between the CCP and CPP (Leng 2017).

Party-to-party relations and China's desire to maintain political status quo in Cambodia came to fruition in 2018 in the lead up to Cambodia's General Election. Chinese official's correspondence with Hun Sen's administration during this time were significant, including China's Ambassador Xiong Bo, who attended a CPP event in Phnom Penh prior to the election (Allard and Chan-Thul 2018). However, most importantly was the U.S. Cybersecurity group, FireEye's report that Chinese hacking group 'TEMP-Periscope' were targeting election infrastructure and opposition leaders in Cambodia ahead of the election (Seiff 2018). FireEye's report said there "can be little doubt they are working on behalf of the Chinese government" (Seiff 2018), with Senior Manager for Cyber Espionage Analysis at FireEye substantiating, "the evidence we have gets us as far as information gathering, it definitely shows that China is very interested in the upcoming elections" (Seiff 2018). Chheang Vannarith, from the ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute in Singapore, claimed this particular election demonstrated unusual behaviour on behalf of China stating "in the past, China kept a very low profile when it came to elections and domestic politics in Cambodia. This time, China is very assertive." (Chheang quoted in Allard & Chan-Thul 2018).

China's ability to execute development plans and construct sections of BRI in Cambodia is intertwined with PM Hun Sen and the CPP. Despite China's asymmetrical power over

Cambodia, China does require Cambodia's cooperation to construct fundamental elements of BRI and maintain access to integral ports (Allard and Chan-Thul 2018). Chheang believes China's interest in the 2018 Cambodian General Election came from learning a 'lesson' in the May 2018 Malaysian election in which the importance of political status quo for Chinese investment was exhibited (Chheang quoted in Allard and Chan-Thul 2018). In May of 2018, when Malaysia's long-ruling coalition was defeated, and Mahathir Mohamad instated as PM, he instantly suspended US\$22 billion worth of Chinese-based infrastructure projects throughout Malaysia, which he believed were too expensive and impractical for the country (Jaipragas 2018). PM Mahathir Mohamad was vocal about his belief that debt forced Former Prime Minister Najib to cede sovereignty to Beijing (Jaipragas 2018). Mahathir Mohamad's open stance and rejection of Chinese capital demonstrated how vital political continuity is to the construction of BRI (Jaipragas 2018).

To progress the evidence of party-to-party patronage exhibited throughout Chapter 4, Chapter 5 will look to demonstrate how the objectives of a patron-state outlined by Shoemaker and Spanier (1984) are reinforcing. The findings displayed through Chapter 4 will offer a foundation to understanding the following two chapters.

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **THE OBJECTIVES OF A PATRON-STATE ARE REINFORCING**

The findings of this study demonstrate how the three objectives of a patron-state are mutually reinforcing and inherently interlinked. Shoemaker and Spanier (1984) stated the three objectives of a patron-state were strategic advantage, international solidarity and ideological convergence. This chapter will showcase how China's pursuit of strategic advantage and international solidarity contributed to PM Hun Sen's ideological convergence to autocracy. In this instance; the process-tracing analysis identified China's overt objective was to obtain strategic advantage and international solidarity, and in doing so, amplified the CPP's ability to concentrate power. Whilst, throughout, this chapter, there is evidence to suggest the concentration of power in Cambodia, benefits China, the intention of this chapter is to show how the objectives of the patron-state are mutually reinforcing. This chapter will detail events in which China seeks strategic advantage or international solidarity from Cambodia. The chapter will conclude by analysing how China's pursuit of strategic advantage and international solidarity have contributed to ideological convergence.

#### **5.1 Strategic Advantage**

China's relationship with Cambodia has allowed China to build trust and gain a voice within Southeast Asia (Chheang 2017). Despite the asymmetry between China and Cambodia, the patron-client dynamic between the two nations offers China access to specific strategic advantages. Through China's patronage to Cambodia, China has secured access to natural resources and geostrategic locations (Burgos and Ear 2010). China has also used The Mekong River Development Plan to construct hydroelectric dams alongside the Mekong River.

### **5.1.1 Influence within Southeast Asia**

The establishment of the ASEAN-Free Trade Agreement in 2010 has allowed China a more profound control of trade within the region and as a result, furthered many countries dependency on China (Devonshire-Ellis 2014). This acts as a strategic benefit to China making trade cheaper within the region, while simultaneously creating an asymmetrical relationship between ASEAN nations and China (Devonshire-Ellis 2014).

China has furthered strategic interests within the region through debilitating the collective strength of ASEAN. The debilitation of ASEAN can be seen through China's strategic technique of constructing one-on-one agreements with ASEAN countries to circumnavigate the collective power of ASEAN. This tactic can be seen through China's bilateral agreements with various countries including Cambodia to construct hydroelectric dams along the Mekong River (Beech 2020). A recent example of this is the proposed bilateral agreement between China and Cambodia to construct the Sambor Dam, which is said to be the most socially and ecologically destructive dam on the Mekong River (Phan 2019). Furthermore, the Sambor Dam would violate principles of cooperation, as its bilateral nature means Vietnam, Thailand, Laos and Myanmar are left in the dark (Phan 2019). This allows countries that would have opposed the construction to be voiceless in the affair, in particular, Vietnam which is affected most by the construction of dams upstream, which has already caused mass droughts in 2016 (Nguyen-Tien 2018). Through creating bilateral agreements, China can take advantage of smaller and poorer nations such as Cambodia and Laos at the expense of other countries (Beech 2020). China's influence within ASEAN will be discussed later in this chapter.

### **5.1.2 Securing Natural Resources**

A primary strategic interest of China is the pursuit of natural resources to supplement its domestic deficit (Burgos & Ear 2010). Cambodia's lack of environmental regulation and untapped natural environment has become a hub for China to extract a wide variety of valuable resources. This has included China's pursuit for oil, China is dependent on cheap coal to generate much of its domestic electricity consumption (Burgos & Ear 2010). Therefore securing long-term oil reserves is a priority for China, which Burgos and Ear (2010) states is "uncomplicated [in Cambodia] because the Cambodian National Petroleum Authority, which administers oil contracts, is under the direct control of a prime minister and deputy prime minister all too happy to sing China's praises" (p.622). China can gain oil through Cambodia by two mechanisms, firstly China has acquired the rights to offshore Cambodian oil fields which according to recent geological reports suggests a substantial amount of oil and gas potentially resides under Cambodian territory (Burgos & Ear 2010). Secondly, securing open access to Sihanoukville's ports allows for the guarantee delivery of imported oil from elsewhere (Burgos & Ear 2010). China's pursuit for hydroelectric power has also been seen throughout Cambodia, with China creating bilateral agreements with Cambodia to build hydroelectric dams along Cambodia's territory of the Mekong River (Burgos & Ear 2010). According to Suy Sem, minister of Cambodia's Ministry of Mines and Energy, with exception of one U.S. hydropower project in the Se San River in North-eastern Cambodia, Chinese companies have provided 100% of the capital to fund hydropower projects in Cambodia (Poindexter 2016).

Chinese companies in Cambodia also secure natural resources through bamboo harvesting in the Kampot region and mining extraction in Northern Cambodia (Burgos & Ear 2010).

Several independent reports including; the International Rivers, the United Nations Environment Program and the Asian Institute of Technology attribute biodiversity loss, lower-water generation capacity and the growing ecological health crisis, in part to China's exploitation of Cambodia's natural resources (Burgos & Ear 2010).

### **5.1.3 Geo Strategic Positioning**

Despite Cambodia being a small and poor nation China has become particularly interested in the geographical positioning of Cambodia and what China can gain from this (Willmott 2011). Cambodia's location has given China access to ports particular in the South of Cambodia, which have the capacity to be used for trade, military, for access to the South China Sea and ultimately as a linchpin for the BRI.

For example, the port of Sihanoukville gives the 3,000 Chinese-registered companies in Cambodia access to trade routes that China cannot access domestically, in particular the port provides easier access to imported oil and other deliverable resources (Burgos & Ear 2010; Veenendaal 2017).

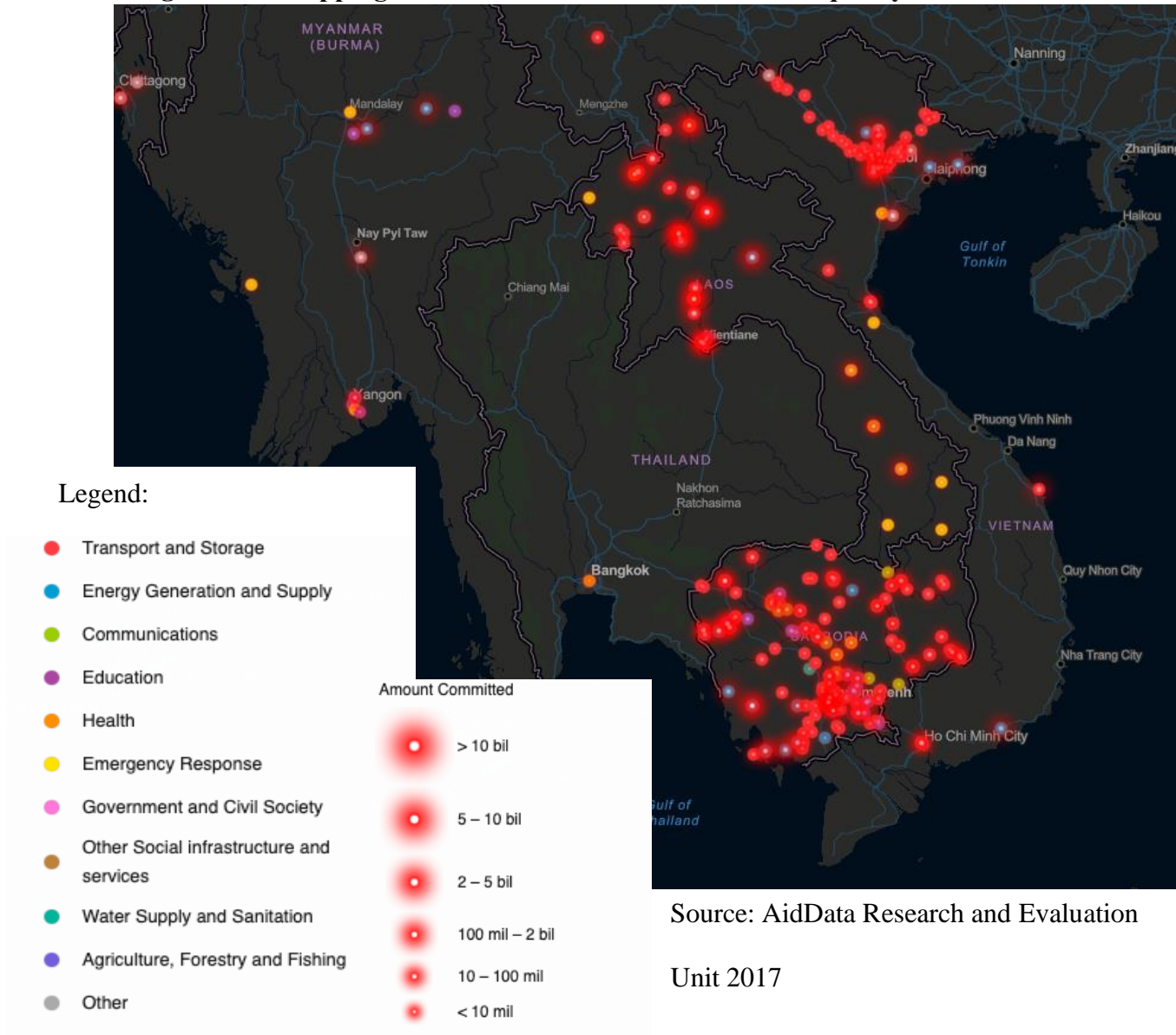
The port of Sihanoukville historically provided military access to both China and the U.S. As the strategic value of Southeast Asia to China continues to grow, China has attempted to exert its dominance (Dahles 2013). China has donated nine patrol boats and five warships which are being docked at the Port of Sihanoukville (Burgos & Ear 2010). The Sihanoukville port offers a strategic location to which China can project its maritime power into the Gulf of Thailand and the Straits of Malacca (Burgos & Ear 2010). In alignment with this, the geostrategic positioning of Cambodia further allows China to monitor its claims to the South



China Sea and the Spratly Islands, offering a sea-accessible location ready and equipped to launch an attack if required (Veenendaal 2017).

Further, it becomes even more evident that Sihanoukville has become a linchpin for the BRI, with China financing a new highway to connect the city to China's vast global trade network (ABC 2018). According to The Guardian of the US\$1.3 billion invested in Sihanoukville over 2017/18, \$1.1 billion has come from China (Ellis-Petersen 2018). While, the strategic value of Cambodia is also contingent on Chinese expansion in countries such as Laos and Myanmar, it is evident that it plays an integral role in the development of BRI in Southeast Asia.

**Figure 10: “Mapping China’s Global Investments and Inequality”**



Source: AidData Research and Evaluation

Unit 2017

Figure 10 shown above by AidData Research and Evaluation Unit 2017, pinpoints Chinese-funded development projects across Cambodia and other countries in mainland Southeast Asia. In accordance to the legend the dots are colour categorised to show the different industry and size categorised to show the amount of finance committed. The map visually encapsulates the extent to which Cambodia has become a linchpin for the BRI. It further demonstrates the concentration of Chinese investment in transport and storage. Figure 10 visually and comparatively encapsulates the strategic importance of Cambodia to China.

#### **5.1.4 The Mekong River Development Plan**

In 1995 the Mekong River Commission was established to discuss collective issues and ways in which to manage the Mekong River between its host countries (Jacobs 2002). However, after refusing to participate in the Mekong River Commission, China in 2015 established the Lancang-Mekong Cooperation Framework in which new rules and regulations were enforced that allowed China to circumnavigate various checks and balances (Biba 2018). This cooperative framework focused on ‘bilateral comprehensive strategic partnerships’ meaning China could negotiate one-on-one agreements with each country, undermining and ultimately disallowing collective power (Biba 2018).

The rejection of environmental concerns has seen the rapid expansion and construction of a series of dams along the Mekong River, particularly upstream in Laos (Biba 2018). In 2016, Southeast Asia faced its worst drought in 100 years, partially due to the dams constructed in upstream China, that affect the entire ecosystem (Nguyen-Tien 2018).

In early 2018 China announced a five-year developmental plan with five countries downstream of the Mekong River (Cambodia, Myanmar, Vietnam, Thailand and Laos) (Grumbine 2018). Cambodia played an explicit role in legitimising and encouraging the cooperation of other Southeast Asian nations to agree to the five-year plan (Boyle and Narin 2018). Leaders met in Phnom Penh to discuss China’s request to build more dams alongside the Mekong River despite alarming environmental concerns (AP News 2018). The meeting, which was chaired by PM Hun Sen and Chinese Premier Li Keqiang foremost demonstrated the strategic importance of the Mekong River to China and secondly offered further insight into the role Cambodia plays as a facilitator for China within the Southeast Asia community (Boyle & Narin 2018). The Mekong River Development Plan has been described by China as

a 'community of shared future' highlighting China's strategic desire to develop partnerships within Southeast Asia (Open Development Mekong 2018)

## **5.2 International Solidarity**

Scholar, Dahles (2013) stated that whilst the economic significance Cambodia plays for China's ability to access cheap labour and natural resources should not be downplayed – it should also be noted that as these resources become scarce its relationship is rapidly transforming into one that is political. Cambodia has continuously exhibited international solidarity with China, this has been exhibited in ASEAN Summits regarding to matters pertaining to the South China Sea and the Belt and Road Initiative.

### **5.2.1 ASEAN and The South China Sea**

The South China Sea remains a continuous conflict between several Southeast Asian nations, China and The U.S. (Sarith 2013). The dispute over the jurisdiction and administration of maritime regions and economic zones has made Cambodia's geographical location and position within ASEAN attractive qualities to China (Sarith 2013).

Cambodia has demonstrated solidarity with China on numerous occasions on matters pertaining to the South China Sea (Chong 2017). Cambodia demonstrated overt clientelism to China in both 2012 and 2016 at The ASEAN Summit meetings on matters regarding the South China Sea. Cambodia displayed international solidarity with China at the 2012 ASEAN Ministerial Meeting (AMM) by objecting to wording that would undermine China's claims to the South China Sea (Reeves 2013). The South China Sea is of strategic interest to China as rapid coastal urbanisation has meant the need for increased hydrocarbons and fisheries (Xu 2014). China's interest in the South China Sea exceeds beyond natural resources, as the

region has become a strategic military zone in which multiple nations claim territory (Xu 2014). Cambodia's act of solidarity with China prevented the AMM from issuing the concluding Chairman's Statement, blocking an ASEAN consensus on the South China Sea dispute (Reeves 2013). The ASEAN community projected much criticism concerning Cambodia's clientelism to China (Un 2013). In protection of China's claims to the South China Sea, China has employed tactics of soft power including "diplomatic protocols, trade and investment, and economic assistance" to attract support from Cambodia and avoid facing a unified ASEAN (Un 2013 p.84). A few days following Cambodia's 2012 clientelism, China provided US\$523 million in loans and grants (Um 2013 p.148). In 2016, Cambodia also received economic patronage for blocking a unanimous consensus on the South China Sea dispute at an ASEAN Conference again demonstrating solidarity with China (Sokheng 2016).

### **5.2.2. Belt and Road Initiative**

The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) established in 2013, is an ambiguous vision of the Chinese government to better connect the trade and transport routes between Asia, Europe and Africa (Chheang 2017). BRI has three core objectives, which is to promote global economic growth, establish global rebalancing and form a new model of regional cooperation (Chheang 2017). For China, Cambodia's early embrace of BRI allowed the project to gain credibility and begin the early stages of construction – with Cambodia providing access to strategic ports.

The two largescale development projects that have been established under BRI's Maritime Silk Road thus far are the first state-level SEZ in Sihanoukville and Kaohkong's Comprehensive Development Experimental Zone in Cambodia.

### **5.3 The Process of Ideological Convergence**

The examples of strategic advantage and international solidarity outlined above all contribute to the process of Cambodia's ideological convergence. Cambodia's ideological convergence is twofold; foremost, it describes PM Hun Sen's personal concentration of power, and secondly, it looks at anti-democratic practices that his government practices.

Whilst China's use of Cambodia to gain influence and credibility within the region does not demonstrate explicit ideological convergence; it does corner the relationships Cambodia can form by creating an asymmetrical dependence on China (Han 2017). In doing so, Cambodia becomes locked within their relationship to China as it is too dependent on the economic patronage. China's ability to construct one-on-one agreements with nations within Southeast Asia further weakens ASEAN's complications with unity and removes safeguards that ensure governments act in accordance with particular regulations, for example, in an environmentally conscious way. This, in turn, promotes poor governance and lack of accountability, allowing PM Hun Sen to act in disregard to regulations.

China's pursuit of Cambodia's natural resources does not demonstrate overt ideological convergence; however, how the Hun Sen government contorts laws and regulations to provide this access to China shows poor governance, lack of accountability and the breakdown of institutional transparency. Cambodia continuously uses anti-democratic practices to circumnavigate environmental protections and resource allocation to allow Chinese investment to go unchecked. An example of this was in 2012 when an environmental activist was shot whilst documenting the illegal logging practices taking place around a controversial Chinese-built dam in the Koh Kong province (Hance 2012). This event brought to light the

widespread illegal logging practices of Chinese companies and the lack of response from the CPP (Hance 2012).

Cambodia's position within ASEAN, geographic location and the South-China Sea dispute, can be viewed collectively as circumstances that have fostered PM Hun Sen's political concentration and the anti-democratic practices within his government. Cambodia's loyalty to China, especially in the face of criticism has contributed to the country's ideological convergence. Cambodia's allegiance to China has isolated Cambodia from the ASEAN community, as countries have concerns over Cambodia's agenda and prioritisation, this aligns with Ciorciari's (2013) theorisation of the impact Sino-Cambodian relations would have. Thai Analyst Thitinan Pongsudhirak discussed the weakening of Cambodia and ASEAN's relationship by claiming Cambodia has become "beholden to Beijing" (Pongsudhirak in Ciorciari 2013 p.4). Various ASEAN diplomats agreed with Pongsudhirak, including Former Singaporean diplomat Kishore Mahubani who stated, "The whole world, including most ASEAN countries, perceived Cambodia's stance as the result of enormous Chinese pressure" (Ciorciari 2013 p.4). These sentiments align with Scott's (1972) theory that client-states will prove its loyalty to the patron even to its own detriment. The international solidarity Cambodia has exhibited with China regarding the South China Sea dispute has substantially affected its relationship with other nations, including the U.S. This shows Cambodia's actions were to appease China.

BRI allows the CPP to strengthen its internal political legitimacy and stability by obtaining external support through developmental assistance (Chen 2018). Again, the partnership of China and Cambodia within the BRI project does not solely produce ideological convergence, but it is a contributing factor within the broader relationship. BRI is emblematic of PM Hun

Sens use of Chinese infrastructure and developmental aid to foster his political legitimacy within Cambodia. As discussed in Chapter 6, PM Hun Sen has intentionally and consistently framed his leadership as the only Cambodian political party capable of maintaining relations with China. PM Hun Sen is using Cambodia's unconditional involvement with BRI as a political tool to demonstrate his ability to foster relationships that provide economic growth and development within Cambodia, at the expense of democratic freedoms. Cambodia's embrace of BRI aligns with the CPP's strategy to develop as quickly as possible to offset the growth Vietnam and Thailand (Chong 2017). The cooperation and development of BRI have allowed PM Hun Sen to enjoy the fruits of Chinese patronage whilst also establishing protection from Cambodia's immediate neighbours (Chong 2017).

In alignment with Carney (1989), Cambodia is beginning to feel domestic unrest as a result of Cambodia's strong alliance with China. Burgos and Ear (2010) state that Cambodia is already experiencing "concerns [regarding] labour abuses, geopolitical backlashes, livelihood disruptions, social unrest, ecological perturbations, economic dependence and biodiversity losses" as a result from their "strategic partnership" with China (Burgos and Ear 2010 p.638). These concerns directly correlate to a process of ideological convergence in which PM Hun Sen is enhancing through his relationship with China.

The Mekong Developmental Plan, again, does not show overt ideological convergence; however, it does display the interests of the Hun Sen administration. PM Hun Sen's position on The Mekong Development Plan demonstrates complete neglect towards severe environmental concerns that could affect water accessibility within Cambodia; instead, his position is that of a client-state attempting to appease the patron – in lieu of domestic concerns.



Similarly, the establishment of several SEZ between China and Cambodia throughout Cambodia is being used by the Hun Sen government to create a faux sense of legitimacy. For example, the Sihanoukville SEZ was said to bring Cambodia an additional 300 factories and 100, 000 jobs by 2020 whilst subsequently enhancing Cambodia connectivity to Chinese markets (Chong 2017). Whilst, historically many of these promises are shown to not eventuate or to be overstated, PM Hun Sen capitalises on these figures – in that he uses them to demonstrate how his government is boosting the local economy and providing jobs to Cambodian people regardless of its actuality (Thayer 2009, Leng 2017). In conjunction with the CPP's tight grip on media censorship these exaggerations going uncontested.

Chinas pursuit of strategic interests and international solidarity contribute to Cambodia's ideological convergence through creating a reinforcing situation in which each decision pushes Cambodia closer to China and contributes to a delegitimization of democracy.

To progress the research findings discussed throughout Chapter 5, Chapter 6 will look at how the economic patronage of China has become critical to PM Hun Sen's political rhetoric.

## CHAPTER 6

# POLITICAL RHETORIC AND CHINESE ECONOMIC PATRONAGE

The process-tracing revealed that hypothesis 1; “*Economic patronage from China to Cambodia has contributed to PM Hun Sen and the CPP’s concentration of power*” provides an adequate explanation to understanding the extent to which China contributed to the democratic decline in Cambodia. This chapter will assess the research findings, foremost, by analysing PM Hun Sen’s political rhetoric of interconnecting economic growth with his political legitimacy (Leng 2017). Once it has been thoroughly outlined that PM Hun Sen’s political legitimacy is contingent on Cambodia’s economic performance, the economic role of Chinese patronage will be discussed. In discussing the financial contribution of China to Cambodia this will be compared to the economic assistance of traditional donors.

Legitimacy within government refers to the ‘right to rule’ which typically comes from domestic sources, including free and fair elections (Gilley 2009). However, in the case of the CPP, PM Hun Sen has utilised the economic support of China to bolster his claims to domestic political legitimacy (Thayer in Retka 2017). This chapter will explore how PM Hun Sen seeks to create legitimacy through external mechanisms and to what capacity China contributes to this.

### 6.1 Prime Minister Hun Sen’s Political Rhetoric

Throughout Cambodian history, economic and political stability have become interlinked, with sizeable economic downturn often accompanying violent regime changes (Chheang 2017). PM Hun Sen’s political career began at the end of the Cambodian Civil War, a period

which coincided with increased foreign investment to Cambodia, as the country experienced less uncertainty (Hutt 2017). As a result, many Cambodians escaped ‘absolute poverty’ with the country experiencing the largest economic growth its history (Hutt 2017). As a result of this, PM Hun Sen has conflated his government with economic growth in Cambodia (Hutt 2017).

Prime Minister Hun Sen uses Cambodia’s violent history to incite fear in the population that without his political stability, the country will once again be thrown into disarray (Chheang 2017). The process-tracing map identified that PM Hun Sen and the CPP have campaigned with a slogan resembling ‘political stability’ and ‘economic growth’ at every commune-level and General Election between 2010 and 2018. This reoccurring motif is two-prong in that it ties PM Hun Sen’s regime to economic growth, whilst also alluding to and inciting fear of the political and economic instability experienced in Cambodia before his rule.

**Figure 11: Cambodian People’s Party campaign slogans.**

<i>Election</i>	<i>CPP Slogan</i>
2012 Commune Elections	<i>Data cannot be found</i>
2013 General Election	‘Peace and prosperity’
2017 Commune Elections	‘Peace and development’
2018 General Election	‘Continued economic development, peace and stability’

Sources: Bangkok Post 2018, Chheang 2017, Aljazeera 2018.

Through the use of continuous political slogans, historic allusions and reoccurring motifs, PM Hun Sen has projected that without the CPP’s stability, Cambodia would not experience favourable economic conditions (Kelsall & Heng 2014). The CPP, therefore, uses Cambodia’s economic growth to validate its political legitimacy and longevity.

## **6.2 Cambodia's Economy**

Since 1998 to 2018 Cambodia has experienced an average economic growth rate of 8% - making it one of the fast-growing economies in the world (The World Bank in Cambodia 2020). By 2015, Cambodia has reached lower-middle-income status; however economic freedom within the country was decreasing significantly (Index of Economic Freedom 2020). Despite Cambodia's immense economic growth, the country remains predominantly impoverished and relies significantly on the financial contribution of other nations (Kaufman 1974). Cambodia's continued reliance on foreign assistance is substantial with estimates claiming between 30 to 40% of the central Cambodian government budget is dependent on donor aid (U.S. Department of State 2018)

## **6.3 China's Contribution to Cambodia's Economic Growth**

The political rhetoric adopted by Chinese officials when discussing its relationship with Cambodia parallels that of PM Hun Sens, the language of stability and development (Embassy of the People's Republic of China in the United States of America 2010). This was demonstrated upon the signing of The Comprehensive Strategic Partnership of Cooperation in 2010, in which Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao stated;

*“Facing the complicated regional and international situation, China and Cambodia should share the opportunities, and join hands in coping with the challenges and promoting peace and development”*

Source: Embassy of the People's Republic of China in the United States of America

Understanding the extent to which China contributes financially to Cambodia is complicated, as China does not use regular Official Development Assistance (ODA) standards and

therefore its contribution is often not included within several of Cambodia's aid reports (Open Development Cambodia 2015).

The data below presents the most reliable and consistent estimations and figures of Chinese FDI/aid/loans available. Utilising both Cambodian and Chinese government sources, independent media and thinktanks, academic analysis and NGO reports, the data shown despite being cross-referenced should be viewed as approximation due to the often unreliability of Chinese and Cambodian government figures.

### **6.3.1 Foreign Direct Investment**

Scholars suggests there is direct causation between FDI and economic growth within developing nations (Silajdzic and Mehic 2015; Sothan 2017). From 2011 onwards China has been Cambodia's largest foreign investor, accumulating US\$8.8 billion in FDI in 2011 (Pheakdey 2012). In 2011 alone Chinese investment was US\$1.2billion, roughly eight times that of the U.S. (Reuters 2013). China's FDI in Cambodia has henceforth surpassed any other nation, with 21.81% of Cambodia's FDI between 1994 and 2019 coming from China (Council for the Development of Cambodia 2020). Chinas contribution to Cambodia's FDI is overwhelming, especially in contrast to the next largest contributor Korea at 6.16% and Hong Kong at 3.05% (Council for the Development of Cambodia 2020).

China's FDI in Cambodia has been disproportionately been concentrated in labour-intensive and export-oriented manufacturing, including industries such as garment production, Cambodia's largest export (Sokang 2018). O'Neill (2014) noted that Chinese FDI in Cambodia has a distinct variation in ownership types, with Chinese State-Owner Enterprises

(SOE’s) dominating the hydropower sector, whilst private firms dominate the garment industry (O’Neill 2014).

**Figure 12: Chinese Foreign Direct Investment in Cambodia (All figures in USD)**

<b>Year</b>	<b>Amount in US \$</b>	<b>Ranking</b>
<b>2010</b>	\$694 million	Largest foreign investor
<b>2011</b>	\$1.2 billion	Roughly ten times that of the U.S.
<b>2012</b>	No data	No data
<b>2013</b>	\$9.6 billion	Largest FDI, more than double second ranked source, South Korea
<b>2014</b>	\$8.446 billion	Largest foreign investor
<b>2015</b>	\$0.86 billion	61% of total FDI inflows
<b>2016</b>	\$748 million	Largest foreign investor
<b>2017</b>	\$1.44 Billion	Largest foreign investor, second ranked to Singapore at US\$252 million
<b>2018</b>	\$3.594 Billion	Largest foreign investor

Sources: Council for the Development of Cambodia 2012, Chan-Thul 2012, O’Neill 2014, ASEAN Investment Report 2015, ASEAN Investment Report 2018, Shira 2017, Xinhua 2017, Sequeria 2018, Pisei 2019.

**6.3.2 Aid and Loans**

Loans given to Cambodia from China have been criticised, with opposition leader Sam Rainsy claiming PM Hun Sen conflates loans with aid when depicting China’s financial contribution to the public (O’Neill 2014). Carl Thayer, a Southeast Asia military expert stated that “the real questions are how does Cambodia repay concessional loans”, this comes as many scholars believe PM Hun Sen’s continuous takings of Chinese loans will lead Cambodia to an inevitable debt trap (Thayer in Retka 2017; Po & Var 2017).

In early 2011 China committed US\$39.6 million in aid to Cambodia through a grant and a further US\$31.7 million in the form of low-interest loans (Chheang 2017; Cooper 2016).

Within the same year, China also provided another US\$7.9 million to the CPP for the construction and furnishing of government office buildings (Cooper 2016). During the following year, 2012, President Hu Jintao's trip to Cambodia saw China pledge US\$70 million in grants for infrastructure project, US\$20 million for military aid and US\$430 million in various infrastructure and construction loans (Pheakdey 2012). The immense financial commitment by President Hu Jintao in 2012 led to China becoming the largest donor to Cambodia (Pheakdey 2012).

In 2014 upon President Xi Jinping's trip to Cambodia, China pledged to provide annual financial developmental assistance to Cambodia through loans ranging from US\$500 to US\$700 million (Cooper 2016). President Xi's pledge demonstrated the acceleration of China's financial contribution to Cambodia, as previous loan estimates sat at US\$100 million in 2007 (Vichar & Gerin 2014). Later in 2014, China pledged a further US\$300 million in preferential loans to assist Cambodia's construction of ten new rice warehouses to increase production and storage facilities within Cambodia (Yapin et al. 2018). In 2016 alone China provided an approximate US\$600 million in aid for a three-year project targeted at increasing construction, improving education and assisting in the running of elections (Rathavong & Vannak 2016).

Chinese loans are predominantly concentrated in physical infrastructure including loans intended for the construction of roads, highways and bridges. By 2017 approximately 70% of roads and bridges in Cambodia were funded through Chinese loans – with loans from China surpassing US\$2 billion (Retka 2017).

Transport Minister Sun Chanthol claimed that more than 2,000 km of roads and seven major bridges were constructed with Chinese finance (Retka 2017). The following year, 2018, China also gave Cambodia a concessional loan of US\$259 million to build a road in Phnom Penh, an important connection for the BRI (ABC 2018; Allard & Chan-Thul 2018). Scholar, Markus Karbaum stated that this investment “reflects Cambodia’s ongoing dependency [on] China which has been funding infrastructure projects.... [for] the kingdom for years” (Retka 2017).

**Figure 13: Chinese investment capital in Cambodia (All figures in USD million)**

<b>Year</b>	<b>Agriculture and agro-industry</b>	<b>Industrial Sector</b>	<b>Physical Infrastructure and Services</b>	<b>Tourism</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>2010</b>	\$191	\$156	No data	\$482	\$829
<b>2011</b>	\$7	\$324	No data	\$1,094	\$1,425
<b>2012</b>	\$27	\$487	No data	No data	\$514
<b>2013</b>	\$213	\$490	No data	\$8	\$711
<b>2014</b>	\$141	\$537	\$156	\$50	\$884
<b>2015</b>	\$63	\$316	No data	\$400	\$779
<b>2016</b>	\$304	\$453	\$115	\$114	\$986

Data Sources: Council for the Development of Cambodia 2020, Chinadaily.com.cn

From 2012 committed investments in Cambodia grew substantially, with the country experiencing a 24% increase from US\$2.9 billion in 2012 to US\$3.6 billion in 2016 (Council for Development of Cambodia 2020). Between 2015 and 2018, the highest contributors to committed investment in Cambodia were steadily China and Cambodia (Council for Development of Cambodia 2020).



**Figure 14: Committed investment in Cambodia (2015-2018)**

<b>Year</b>	<b>2015</b>		<b>2016</b>		<b>2017</b>		<b>2018</b>	
<b>Total</b>	\$4.6 billion		\$3.6 billion		\$6.3 billion		\$6.4 billion	
<b>Rank</b>	<b>Country</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>Country</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>Country</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>Country</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>1</b>	Cambodia	69.28	China	29.92	Cambodia	50.68	China	51.06
<b>2</b>	China	18.62	Cambodia	27.55	China	25.97	Cambodia	31.15

Data Source: Council for the Development of Cambodia 2020

As noted above (Figure 11) China consistently contributes the most finance to committed investments, often more than Cambodia itself (Council for the Development of Cambodia 2020). In 2018, the year of Cambodia’s General Election, China contributed to over half the committed investments within Cambodia, which showed a 25.09% increase from the previous year (Council for the Development of Cambodia 2020). China’s committed investments in Cambodia demonstrate its fundamental role in contributing to the narrative that PM Hun Sen’s is responsible for the economic growth in Cambodia.

The data exhibited above also poses the question of whether China’s ‘no-questions-asked’ loans increase Cambodia’s likelihood of falling into a debt trap with China, creating an even more significant power imbalance and deepening clientelist behaviours.

## **6.4 Weakening economic relationship with U.S. and EU**

There is a general consensus that as a result of China's no-strings-attached approach to foreign loans, traditional donors, namely the US and EU's attempts to strengthen democratic practices in Cambodia are undermined (Sullivan 2011). The impact of this was demonstrated in 2012 when the US President Obama upon meeting PM Hun Sen in Phnom Penh stated that the "lack of progress on issues related to democracy and human rights is an impediment to the United States and Cambodia developing a deeper bilateral relationship" (Todd 2016). The economic impacts of this were made clear in 2018 when the U.S. established of the Asia Reassurance Initiative Act (ARIA) (Thayer 2019). ARIA established new U.S. priorities and initiatives to promotion democracy, civil society, rule of law and human rights, (Thayer 2019). ARIA also banned funds to Cambodia that may benefit the current government, in accordance to its democratisation conditions (Thayer 2019).

The implications of unconditional Chinese finance according to Ear means that "When Cambodia falls under pressure from international bodies to reform its human rights abuses, corruption, oppression of its people, or misuse of power, it turns to China for financial support" (Ear in Var & Po 2017).

This was demonstrated in 2018 when the United States withdrew election funding and the European Union removed trade preferences to Cambodia, after the Supreme Court dissolved the opposition party, CNRP (Um 2018). However, in alignment with Ear's theorisation, the loss of traditional donor support saw PM Hun Sen supplement this through Chinese aid and investment (Um 2018). This was demonstrated through Chinas immediate increase in election funding, the pledge to send electoral observers and a pledge by Chinese investors to commit approximately US \$7 billion in new investments (See chapter 4 for further analysis) (Chheangpor 2017).

The weakening of a U.S. aid to Cambodia can be seen comparatively to Chinese aid trends in Figure 12 below.

**Figure 15: Chinese and United States Aid to Cambodia (All figures in USD Million)**

Year	Chinese aid	United States
2010	\$154.1	\$72
2011	\$332.0	\$57
2012	\$460.7	\$113
2013	\$436.6	\$107
2014	\$347.8	\$126
2015	\$339.4	\$85
2016	\$265.3	\$104
2017	\$223.5	\$96
2018	\$251.4	\$152

Sources: The Council for the Development of Cambodia 2020, National Bureau of Statistics of the People’s Republic of China, Cohen 2019, Siphath 2015, Sullivan 2011, Pheakdey 2012.

Figure 12 demonstrates that between 2010 – 2018 Chinese aid to Cambodia was consistently and substantially more significant than U.S. aid. The trends displayed above show that rather than the U.S.’s conditional aid forcing Cambodia to practice good governance, it instead supplements this deficit with Chinese aid, embedding its economic dependence on China further. This pattern of reinforcement will be further discussed in 6.5.

## 6.5 Does Economic Patronage Contribute to Ideological Convergence

This section will examine whether PM Hun Sen's political rhetoric and Chinese economic patronage have contributed to the ideological convergence of Cambodia. Foremost, Premier Wen Jiabao's statement that the Chinese and Cambodian relationship is categorised by 'promoting peace and development' in 2010 interlinked these concepts as mutually exclusive (Embassy of the People's Republic of China in the United States of America). Henceforth, PM Hun Sen and the CPP have emphasised this mantra of stability and development to bolster its claims to legitimacy, whilst inciting fear as to what would happen without its leadership. President Xi Jinping again demonstrated this political rhetoric in his 2016 trip to Cambodia in which he stated, "China attaches great importance to ties with Cambodia and stands ready to enhance the comprehensive strategic cooperation and contribute to *regional peace and prosperity*" (Savic 2016). President Xi Jinping's phrase directly correlated with PM Hun Sen's General Election slogan of 'peace and prosperity'.

PM Hun Sen has used the mantra of 'peace and development' to incite fear of civil war if his leadership is not maintained including statements such as "to ensure peace and to continue the development, the only option is that the CPP must win elections at all stages," which he stated prior to the 2017 local elections (Cochrane 2017).

The social impact of the motif of 'political stability' and the underlying threat that this represents has an immense effect on a country that has experienced approximately three decades of political instability (Sothan 2017). The subsequent threat of fear and violence is also verified and legitimated through China's indifference towards human right abuses within Cambodia. Opposition Leader Sam Rainsy alluded to this when he stated: "China doesn't give any consideration to human rights. That's why the Cambodian government likes to get

loans from China, it is easy money” (Maza 2016). This speaks to what is known as the ‘Beijing consensus’ meaning that through China’s use of soft power, they have exhibited that neo-liberal policies are not a pre-requisite for economic development (Un 2009). As a result of Beijing consensus, China has aided Cambodia’s ability to develop economically without complying with conditions of good governance. Evidence suggest that China’s view that aid is ‘value-neutral’ perpetuates the status quo of autocrat leaders (Un 2009). Therefore, the immense financial support China offers the CPP, allows Cambodia to reject traditional donors who attempt to put democratic conditions on financial support (Un 2009).

In alignment with Chinas foreign policy of non-interference; Chinese finance does not have domestic conditions; in that, it does not ask Cambodia to comply with democratic practices or uphold human rights like other nations do. Minister of Commerce Cham Prasidh summed up Cambodia’s preference for Chinese loans by stating “China has proven different from other donors. They don’t impose conditions... Others say, ‘You have to do this with human rights, you have to do that with democratic reforms. China doesn’t” (O’Neill 2014). The absence of democratic conditions allows the CPP to concentrate power whilst also receiving economic reinforcement.

Therefore, China’s foreign policy of ‘non-interference’ contributes to a concentration of power within Cambodia. Multiple scholars, including Buckley (2007), Kolstad (2012) and Wiig (2012) have found that China directs its outward FDI to countries with ‘poor institutions’ (O’Neill 2014). As a result of the lack of democratic accountability and transparency in countries like Cambodia, China is afforded a freer hand in determining FDI (O’Neill 2014). Chinas strategic interest, therefore, benefits from the stability of PM Hun Sen,

with his overdependence on China for economic patronage and legitimacy affording China with political leverage (Chheang 2017).

Thayer stated that the CPP gets “domestic spin-offs” for taking credit of development within Cambodia funded by the Chinese (Thayer in Retka 2017). This was evident in the 2012 commune-elections, which showed a direct interlinkage between PM Hun Sen’s legitimacy and Chinese economic patronage. In the 2012 commune elections the CPP gained the majority of seats in 97% communes – a success Un (2013) believes can be attributed to two factors. Foremost the corruption of the state and its intentional obstruction of resources for opposition parties was a contributing factor to the success of the CPP (Un 2013). Secondly, Un (2013) states that the CPP was able to adequately address infrastructure concerns in rural regions of Cambodia through loans provided to the CPP (p.143). Commune councils distributed funds to improve infrastructure and begin new construction projects before the election (Un 2013 p.143). Another example in which Chinese economic patronage has bolstered the CPP’s claims to legitimacy was in 2016 when China played a substantial role in assisting Cambodia in speeding up the process of expanding the SEZ Industrial Park in Sihanoukville (Leng 2017). The expansion of the SEZ Industrial Park in Sihanoukville generated approximately 200,000 jobs in the region, affording the CPP legitimacy prior to the 2017 commune elections (Leng 2017).

The following section will interpret the results of this study and discuss whether they proved or disproved the hypotheses and alternative explanation outlined in Chapter 3.

## **CHAPTER 7**

### **INTERPRETING THE RESEARCH FINDINGS**

To ensure credibility and consistency in the research process, two hypotheses and an alternative theory were developed to assess the findings.

Hypotheses:

1. Economic patronage from China to Cambodia has contributed to PM Hun Sen and the CPP's concentration of power.
2. Cambodia's increased alignment with China allows PM Hun Sen to ignore international criticism and sanctions imposed on Cambodia as a result of the CPP's infringement on democratic freedoms.

The Alternative Explanation:

1. Chinese aid and investment have aided Cambodia's development. However, Hun Sen's concentration of power is predominantly the result of the CPP's systematic breakdown of democratic institutions and entrenched political corruption.

To interpret the findings the following section will assess each hypothesis/alternative explanation and the causal mechanisms present within the research to determine whether the study proved or disproved it.

For Hypothesis 1 to be valid the study had to demonstrate the causal mechanism that core sections of Cambodia's economy are linked to Chinese patronage. Through a comparative analysis between Chinese donorship and traditional donors, this research showed a disproportionate amount of Cambodia's economy to be reliant on Chinese economic patronage (See: Figure 12, 13, 14 & 15). This included China being the leading source of

FDI into Cambodia from 2011 onwards (Sothan 2017; Sokang 2018). In 2011, China's FDI to Cambodia was approximately \$1.2 billion, roughly eight times that of the U.S. (Chan-Thul 2012). The same trend has been seen in aid donations, with estimates suggesting that in 2017 China contributed \$223.5 million in aid to Cambodia, compared to the U.S.'s \$96 million. For Hypothesis 1 to be valid the causal mechanism needed to exist demonstrating that PM Hun Sen relies on economic growth to validate his political longevity. Through the political rhetoric of PM Hun Sen showcased (See: Figure 11) this thesis demonstrated that economic growth is a fundamental element to PM Hun Sen's legitimacy. Therefore, the research collected accepts Hypothesis 1.

Hypothesis 2 suggests that conditional aid by traditional donors such as the U.S. and EU reinforces Cambodia's relationship with China. For Hypothesis 2 to be accepted, the causal mechanism needed to demonstrate that Cambodia preferences aid that does not have conditions of democratisation and good governance. This reinforcing relationship was exhibited throughout Chapter 4, in which it was demonstrated that rather than Cambodia complying with the conditions of aid put forth by the U.S. and EU, Cambodia instead supplements this loss through Chinese finance. For Hypothesis 2 to be valid, it also must be shown that traditional donors have placed sanctions or withdrawn aid based on violations to the conditions in which they set. An example of this was in 2018 when the U.S. halted \$8.3 million worth of aid due to "recent setbacks in democracy" (Lynn 2018). Furthermore, for Hypothesis 2 to be accepted, Chinese and Cambodian cooperative agreements must have also reflected its growing economic relationship. The announcement of the Belt and Road Initiative saw a significant increase in the cooperative agreements between China and Cambodia. Further, the party-to-party patronage of the CCP and CPP saw 31 cooperation



agreements signed in October 2016 alone (Leng 2017). Therefore, in accordance with the findings presented Hypothesis 2 is accepted.

The alternative explanation presented requires China to be a component of Cambodia's economic development, however, neglects the notion that this affects democracy.

Furthermore, for this alternative theory to be true, there must be no evidence of patron-client relations. Evidence also must suggest that Cambodian democratic breakdown is purely the result of internal politics, with no influence or enablement from foreign actors. For the alternative theory to be valid, causal mechanisms would demonstrate that the CPP systematically removed democratic institutions in Cambodia. This was proven true on numerous accounts including the CPP's use of the Supreme Court to dismantle the CNRP (Bhattacharjee 2018). However, in isolation this causal mechanism does not prove the overall explanation. Causal mechanisms also needed to demonstrate that the Cambodian state, opposed to the CPP, benefited from Chinese patronage, which was proven incorrect. Chapter 4 exhibits the party-to-party patronage present between the CCP and CPP, disproving this causal mechanism. Furthermore, for the alternative theory to be accepted, evidence would need to show that PM Hun Sen did not require Chinese economic patronage to concentrate his power. Estimates suggests up to 40% of the central Cambodian Governments budget comes from donor aid, which China contributes the majority towards (U.S. Department of State 2018). Furthermore, Figure 11 showed that between 2015 – 2018, China was consistently the largest foreign contributor to committed investment (Council for the Development of Cambodia 2020). Therefore, the findings present throughout this study disprove the alternative explanation.

The limitations of this study will be outlined in the following chapter, alongside recommendations for future researchers.

## **CHAPTER 8**

### **LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

#### **7.1 Learning from the Methodology – Lessons about Correlation and Causation**

The most prominent challenge faced in this research was the ability to decipher between correlation and causation. To ensure the study was consistent indicators and parameters were established, allowing the possibility of other causal factors to be considered. Whilst doing so was vital to ensure research neutrality, this meant particular events might have been overlooked as they did not fit the rigid research parameters. As the research was limited by available data and information, deciphering between correlation and causation became a shortcoming of this thesis.

#### **7.2 Limitations within this Study & Recommendations for Future Researchers**

Heavy media censorship in China and Cambodia meant access to information (particularly pertaining to economics) was often not available or unreliable. While the data and information presented throughout this paper has been cross-referenced, particular government agencies have been criticised for over/underestimating figures. China's use of concessional loans also meant that access to exact financial figures were scarce. This shortcoming was addressed through collating data from a wide range of sources to achieve the most reliable approximate figures possible.

Researchers can further this study with an emphasis on interviews and field research. This could include interviewing exiled CNRP members and other key CCP and Cambodian personnel, an intention of this thesis prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. This would allow access to information and insights that cannot be gained through publicly accessible data.

## CONCLUSION

This paper aimed to answer the question ‘To what extent has the Chinese Government contributed to the decline of multiparty democracy in Cambodia?’. To do so, this thesis used the research methodology, process tracing to determine whether causation was present between Chinese patronage and democratic breakdown in Cambodia. By interpreting the results using the theoretical framework of patron-client theory, this paper was able to achieve a broader understanding of the implications of Sino-Cambodian relations. As a result, this thesis has contributed to literature regarding the application of patron-client theory to China and Southeast Asia. It has achieved this through identifying specific characteristics of China’s give-take relationships and how it interacts with strategically beneficial nations.

Utilising a comparative approach, this thesis assessed how traditional aid donors, including the U.S. and EU differ to the economic patronage of China. The study found that traditional donors will use conditional aid in countries that have a lack of democratic political stability. Whereas, in accordance to China’s foreign policy of non-interference, China ensures reliability through forming party-to-party relations. The study found that aid with conditions such as political reform or democratisation have reinforced Cambodia’s economic dependency on China. Additionally, the study demonstrated the generational history of party-to-party relations between the CCP and CPP. In doing so, this research contributed to the ‘Chinese Model’ of patron-client theory by analysing how this framework exists on the level of the party. This finding, in conjunction with analysis in Chapter 6 (See: Figure 11, 12 & 15) demonstrated the causal mechanisms that would be present for the acceptance of Hypothesis 2; *‘Cambodia’s increased alignment with China allows PM Hun Sen to ignore international criticism and sanctions imposed on Cambodia as a result of the CPP’s infringement on*

*democratic freedoms*'. Within the findings of Chapter 4, the alternative explanation's causal mechanism that *'The CPP has systematically removed democratic practices and institutions, allowing government corruption'* was shown to be a partial truism. However, in accordance to the weighted evidence (See: Figure 6) this was only *'relatively supportive to alternative theory; but also supportive to both hypotheses'*. Furthermore, the alternative explanation's causal mechanism that *'There is a clear distinction between the CPP and the Cambodian state. The CPP does not benefit from Chinese patronage, but the Cambodian state could'* was demonstrated to be incorrect throughout this thesis, ultimately disproving the alternative explanation.

The study further demonstrated how the objectives of a patron-state outlined by Shoemaker and Spanier (1984) are reinforcing. Shoemaker and Spanier (1984) state that a patron-states objective are strategic advantage, international solidarity and ideological convergence. This thesis determined that China's pursuit for strategic advantage and international solidarity, has contributed to the ideological convergence of Cambodia. Importantly, this finding acknowledged that China's overt objective is not ideological convergence, rather it is the pursuit of strategic advantage and international solidarity.

This thesis analysed PM Hun Sen's political rhetoric, in which he intermarries Cambodia's economic growth and the CPP's longevity (See: Figure 11). Through doing so, this research outlined that PM Hun Sen's internal political legitimacy has been forged through the economic patronage of China. By conducting a comparative analysis between FDI and aid/loans from traditional donors and China, to Cambodia, this study demonstrated Cambodia's asymmetrical dependency on China. Therefore, through interpreting the research

throughout Chapter 6, this thesis accepts Hypothesis 1; *‘Economic patronage from China to Cambodia has contributed to PM Hun Sen and the CPP’s concentration of power’*.

Ultimately, this thesis contributed to the theoretical application of patron-client theory to China and Southeast Asia by distinguishing the unique characteristics of how China forms give-take relationships. Most notably, China’s use of party-to-party patronage contributed to an understanding of the ‘Chinese Model’ to patron-client relations. Furthermore, this research demonstrated that China contributed to democratic breakdown in Cambodia indirectly. This can be shown through China’s immense investment in Cambodia (See: Figure 10), the comparative amount of aid, loans and FDI China contributes to Cambodia compared to traditional donors (See: Figure 12, 13, 14 & 15) and how this has enabled PM Hun Sen’s ability to ignore international criticism and sanctions whilst still gaining internal legitimacy (See: Figure 11, 7, 8 & 9).

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